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TRACING THE CHANGE PROCESS: FOSTERING AND SUSTAINING STUDENT
AFFAIRS CULTURES OF ASSESSMENT

by

Margaret Leary

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2018

Dissertation Committee:

Christopher B. Newman, Ph.D.
Lea Hubbard, Ph.D.
Gavin W. Henning, Ph.D.

University of San Diego

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University of San Diego
School of Leadership and Education Sciences

CANDIDATE'S NAME: Margaret Leary

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: TRACING THE CHANGE PROCESS:
FOSTERING AND SUSTAINING STUDENT AFFAIRS CULTURES OF
ASSESSMENT

APPROVAL:

Christopher B. Newman, PhD Chair

Lea Hubbard, PhD Member

Gavin W. Henning, PhD Member

DATE: April 3, 2018

ABSTRACT

Student affairs professionals have long been strong contributors to college student learning and development and supporters of the perspective that holistic postsecondary learning is critical for not only the individual but society as well. With more attention focused on the value of this learning, student affairs has taken steps to foster and establish cultures of assessment by creating positions for individuals to coordinate assessment efforts across the division – a student affairs assessment leader. Most of the literature focusing on student affairs is informed by valuable practitioner experience and can be strengthened by empirical study. This explanatory single case study explores how a student affairs assessment culture at a four-year public institution has been sustained for over two decades. By examining the structural, cultural, and agentic factors, as well as their interaction and by applying organizational change theories to the maturing student affairs assessment literature, this study provides a more complex analysis of this important phenomenon of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. This case study utilizes process tracing to understand the change process and gathers multiple sources of evidence through interviews, observation, and document analysis to explore causal relationships among the factors influencing the change process.

This study's findings suggest that specific structural, cultural, and agentic factors, their interaction, as well as recognition and external influences were involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the student affairs division under study. This research builds on the theoretical work of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) by extending the usefulness of their Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System model to the higher education setting, which embodies unique

organizational features. These distinctive features may account for the modifications suggested in this study for applicability in the higher education setting.

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This dissertation study would not have been possible without the generosity that members of the Change University division of student affairs extended me in allowing me to listen to their reflections about their change process. Their experience is rich and I learned a great deal from their insights. I want to especially thank Thomas for all of the time he invested in coordinating my visit, helping me recruit participants, and ensuring all of my questions were answered. I also want to thank those that reviewed one of my chapters for accuracy and for providing access to many historical documents related to the study.

Beyond the graciousness of this study's participants, I am grateful for many things in my life, many of which trace back to my educational journey. This most recent experience of pursuing a doctoral degree was only possible because of the support and encouragement of my committee who challenged me and motivated me to produce my best work throughout the program. Dr. Christopher Newman provided guideposts at critical points along the way through advising on courses that most aligned with my goals, providing flexibility as a working parent, asking critical questions, and helping me interpret the various perspectives that have shaped this work. Dr. Lea Hubbard fostered my interest in and deepened my understanding of qualitative approaches to research. Lea challenged me to push beyond the surface level to pursue the contradictions, explore the messy part, and seek the deeper meaning and I appreciate the time she invested in my development as a qualitative researcher. And Dr. Gavin Henning developed my interest in assessment and inspired my pursuit of becoming a scholar in this area. His leadership and influence in this area of scholarship and practice is profound and he has been a

consistent presence in my educational and professional journey through his contributions to the field generally as well as his interest and unwavering willingness to provide feedback on any project with which I am involved. My gratitude cannot be overstated.

I have also been fortunate to work with the most amazing colleagues throughout my career, many of whom have contributed in both large and small ways to helping me accomplish my educational goals. I entered the field of higher education through a nontraditional path because Rev. John Stack, O.S.A. and Dr. Christine Lysionek saw something in me that led them to take a chance and give me an opportunity that I cherish more than they know. They opened a door for me to pursue a masters degree and for their open-mindedness and willingness to develop me as a student affairs professional, I am most grateful. Two other colleagues who have supported my inquiry of organizational change and assessment are Dr. Paula Krist and Dr. Carole Huston. I have often sought their guidance, insights, and critique of my work and they have always been willing supporters and encouraged my academic pursuits. There are many other colleagues who have directly or indirectly contributed to the completion of this degree, whether through expressing interest in my topic and engaging in dialogue about it, inquiring about my progress, or just sharing encouragement to persist; they have each helped me continue believing in myself.

The most important influences on my educational journey are my family to whom I am wholeheartedly grateful. As I think back on my path, I realize that some important things had to happen for me to be in a position to complete a doctoral degree. I always did well in high school and while I was a very good student, success was relatively easy for me. At that time in my life, I was very comfortable in my academic and my social

identities and not so interested in going on to college because it meant leaving a place of comfort that I had worked hard to create. But a few consistent messages from my parents resonate with me to this day as I consider my educational journey: “you can do anything you put your mind to” and “you can decide not to go to college but you have to try it for two years.” These two messages were pivotal in my educational journey. I recall working with my high school guidance counselor on college applications and routinely completing the process with little interest. The turning point for me happened one afternoon sitting in the living room with my dad when he encouraged me to consider a school that was not on my radar. This nudge led to several critical transformational moments in my life including exploring my faith in a deep, meaningful way, beginning to fully understand who I am, finding a career that feeds my soul, and most importantly meeting my life partner. Going to college was not something I thought about much in high school, most people I knew or am related to did not attend college. My parents knew that this was an important step for me and because my father worked so hard, my parents made sacrifices for my future, and they believed in me, I was able to attend college and complete an undergraduate degree. My father navigated his way from a working class background to a middle class professional and lifted me up so that I could fly. There are no words to capture what this means to me.

These elements of my educational journey and family background are critical to the formation of the values that have shaped me and led to my love of learning, a commitment to persistence, and a belief that anything of value it is worth working hard to achieve. Pursuing a Ph.D. is a tremendous commitment of time and energy and as a working parent and partner, this meant making hard choices about where I spent my time

and energy. I would not have been able to complete this process without the unending support and understanding of my family and friends and especially of my life partner, Mark, and my two incredible children, Noah and Hannah. I have learned through this program that there is no such thing as balance, and that what I can control is to be present where I choose to spend my time and energy. I look forward to engaging in ways and activities that I felt I could not, especially during this last push, and making sure they feel my love and gratitude each day. I hope that one day they understand the tensions of the choices I have made in deciding to pursue this degree and that my choices inspire them to achieve their dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

This study examines the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. Specifically, the study focuses on understanding the process of moving between a starting point for a culture of assessment and an established culture of assessment. Two theoretical frames ground the study: Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System and Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought on organizational change in higher education. These two theoretical frames complement one another in two important ways. First, Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought provide lenses through which to derive indicators of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) structural, cultural, and agentic factors of change. And second, Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought anchor the change process in the higher education setting which differs from the K-12 context, the focus of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) work. This study accepts Kezar's (2014) assertion that implementing assessment in higher education is a second-order change which involves addressing "underlying values, assumptions, structures, processes, and culture" (p. 49). And the case selected for this study is an example of a second-order change (Kezar, 2014) because of the duration of their change process and the features of their assessment culture.

The next section discusses the context for the study including the current debate over the value of a college education, higher education's responsibility for demonstrating

the quality of college student learning, and student affairs' role in ensuring the quality of co-curricular learning which typically occurs outside the classroom.

Background

The debate over the purpose and value of higher education in the United States has intensified over the past decade. The Spellings Commission Report (2006) activated a national discussion focused on the value of a college degree and how best to hold higher education accountable for and the quality of college student learning. This report sharpened the different perspectives in the debate on the value and purpose of higher education; the individualistic and common good perspectives represent the two ends of the spectrum in this debate. Those taking an individualistic perspective largely define the value of higher education in terms of a return on investment and focus on how a college education benefits the individual in securing future employment, higher earnings, and employer subsidized benefits such as health care (Perna & Finney, 2014, pp. 7-9). Those taking the common good perspective regarding the value of a college degree acknowledge these individual benefits and extend them to societal benefits indicating that lower unemployment, better earnings, and less reliance on state and federal sponsored health care benefit society as well as the individual (Perna & Finney, pp. 9-11). Further, the common good perspective asserts that beyond the return on investment embraced by the individualist perspective, the focus of the college experience has and continues to be trifold, emphasizing the cognitive, affective, and practical aspects of learning and development (Bowen, 1977). This latter perspective focuses not only on what college students learn academically, within the classroom, but also what they learn outside the classroom, in the co-curriculum. These two perspectives are important because they

influence the extent to which colleges and universities emphasize assessment of student learning and development which is the focus of this study. I describe each perspective in more detail and identify how each is linked to co-curricular assessment, the assessment of student learning that occurs outside the classroom.

The Individualistic Perspective

The individualistic perspective argues that higher education is becoming less affordable for many Americans and that the debt students and families take on limits their economic independence when graduates either cannot find jobs or at least jobs with a substantial enough salary to pay back this debt (Johnstone, 2011, p. 327-336). These conditions have influenced students' choice of institution and major often privileging majors that are more likely to yield higher salaries and rates of job placement. There is no doubt that costs have increased; the cost of attending college has increased 33% at public institutions and 25% at private institutions over the 10-year period ending in the 2014-15 academic year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Price sensitivity has been heightened since the Great Recession in 2008 and those that support the individualistic perspective include state lawmakers who have largely withdrawn funding for higher education since that time. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state spending for public institutions has decreased by 18% per student between 2008-2015; with the exception of four states that have increased funding, the decreases range from less than 1% to 56%. (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2016). As a result, students and families are taking on increasing debt to offset reduced funding from the states. The number of students borrowing to pay for college has increased along with the amount of debt they incur. In 1992-93, 49% of college students borrowed

\$12,434 on average to finance their degree; this number has grown to 69% of undergraduates incurring \$26,885 in student loan debt on average in 2011-12 (Fry, 2014).

This shift in cost from the public to the individual makes higher education less affordable and less accessible for most Americans. It also demonstrates the lack of confidence that the public in general and lawmakers specifically have in the value of a college education. The federal government created the College Scorecard, a tool to assist students and families in decision-making about whether and where to pursue a college degree, including an assessment as to whether they will acquire “the skills needed to find a well-paying job and repay their loans successfully” (United States Department of Education, 2016). The College Scorecard is an example of the federal government’s emphasis on only certain outcomes of higher education – affordability, graduation rates, and high-paying jobs for graduates. While tools like the Scorecard are helpful to students and families discerning whether and where to pursue a college education, these tools limit the decision-making process to those factors that support the individualistic perspective of the value of a college education. This perspective focuses on return on investment for the individual rather than consideration of what students actually learn, how they develop during college, and how a college-educated individual contributes to society.

The Common Good Perspective

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the Lumina Foundation, and scholars (e.g., Bowen, 1977) have established a more holistic perspective on the value and purpose of a college degree. In a seminal analysis, Bowen (1977) distinguished between higher education goals for the individual and goals for society as follows. The main goal for individual students is to foster learning in three

dimensions: cognitive, affective, and practical. The cognitive dimension includes developing intellectual skills while the affective dimension includes elements such as personal self-discovery, psychological well-being, and the development of values and morals. The practical dimension focuses on citizenship, leadership, and economic productivity. The goals for society include preserving and disseminating culture, discovering and sharing new knowledge, economic efficiency and growth, and identifying and solving social issues (pp. 55-59). Bowen's work emphasizes both the individual and collective value of a college education and includes preparing students for a career not just their first job post-graduation.

More recently, in a research study commissioned by AAC&U, Hart Research Associates (2006) found that employers and recent college graduates strongly support the purpose of higher education as providing a balance of a well-rounded education and specific job preparation. They also agree that higher education has a strong influence on the country's economic progress in the global economy. These findings informed the work of groups like AAC&U and the Lumina Foundation. Beyond the specific intellectual skills students should acquire in college, AAC&U (2007) urged colleges and universities to emphasize outcomes such as teamwork, civic knowledge and engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning when they introduced their Essential Learning Outcomes in 2007. AAC&U has continued to commission research in this area (Hart & Associates, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015) and promote the values of holistic, liberal learning (e.g., AAC&U, 2017a, 2017b, 2013). The Lumina Foundation offered the Degree Qualifications Profile in 2011 emphasizing such outcomes as civic and global learning

and engaging diverse perspectives in addition to intellectual learning (Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Schneider, 2011).

The common good perspective takes a more complex view of the value and purpose of higher education by encompassing the individualistic perspective and adding these more holistic dimensions. This perspective emphasizes how a college degree not only benefits the individual but also society and supports the argument for sharing the costs of higher education among the individual and society rather than shifting those costs solely to the individual. The common good perspective accepts that the cost of higher education is high and needs to be addressed and it also works to demonstrate that the degree is valuable not only to the individual but also to society as a whole.

Demonstrating Value

While the defining elements of the value and purpose of higher education may be disputed, both sides of the debate agree that the value of a college education must be demonstrated. As this debate has unfolded, higher education as an institutional system has not responded in a way that encourages a more holistic view of the value of a college education. In its first effort at a response, the Voluntary System of Accountability (2007), largely reinforced the individualistic perspective. Organizations such as the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (2011) are refining higher education's response to make college student learning transparent to stakeholders in addition to the basic metrics such as enrollment, retention, and graduation. Assessment is a means to demonstrate what students learn and how they develop through the college experience. Despite federal and state government emphasis on enrollment, retention, and graduation metrics as well as regional accreditors' sharpened focus on evidence of

holistic student learning, colleges and universities have been slow to respond (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Although higher education has been experimenting with assessment for over 30 years, this practice has not been firmly established at institutions across the U.S. in the curricular or co-curricular arenas. With this broader conception of “what college graduates need to know and be able to do” (AAC&U, 2007, p. 7) and a renewed emphasis on the quality of that learning, student affairs divisions within higher education institutions have taken a more central role in this debate.

Student Affairs’ Role and Response

Student affairs became a more accountable contributor to the discussion about the quality and assessment of student learning as AAC&U (2007), the Lumina Foundation (2011), and Bowen (1977) articulated the more holistic nature of learning achieved through a college education. Their efforts are consistent with student affairs’ values as a field, the division historically most responsible for co-curricular learning in higher education. From its genesis, the field of student affairs has viewed itself as an integral contributor to student learning and development and has held assessment of such processes as a core belief (American Council on Education Studies, 1937 & 1949). A review of the student affairs formative documents¹ reveals that several key values inform

¹ These documents include *The Student Personnel Point of View*, 1937 & 1949 (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949), *A Perspective on Student Affairs: A Statement Issued on the 50th Anniversary of the Student Personnel Point of View* (National Association of Student Affairs Professionals, 1987), *The Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1996), *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Affairs Professionals, 1997), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel

the foundation and current practice of the field: (1) student affairs is an integral contributor to student learning and development; (2) student affairs work is coordinated with other divisions of the institution, (3) assessment of student learning and development is critical to identifying areas for improvement; and (4) resources are managed efficiently. The first two values focus on how student affairs practitioners help students learn and develop, the second two values focus on how student affairs can demonstrate that learning and development is occurring and that resources are aligned with effective efforts. These values that shape the field are promoted through professional organizations, conferences, and other ongoing learning opportunities for student affairs professionals. Over the past decade, more specialized opportunities have emerged that exemplify the value of assessment within the field. For example, the ACPA – College Student Educators International’s Commission on Assessment, Evaluation, and Research hosts an annual Assessment Institute, publishes articles on student affairs assessment matters, and showcases assessment presentations at the ACPA annual Convention. Other organizations have similar structures and resources and individual institutions also host assessment conferences.

With heightened responsibility for providing holistic learning and new attention on the latter two values (assessment and efficient resource management), student affairs divisions have allocated increasing resources to support co-curricular assessment with some investing in staff positions dedicated to coordinating co-curricular assessment across the division, a student affairs assessment leader (SAAL). These positions often

Association, & National Association of Student Affairs Professionals, 1998), and *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004).

take the lead role in helping the units in the division understand why and how they should be doing assessment and fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment within the division. The number of these positions at institutions across the U.S. has grown over time. Malaney (1999) identified 35 offices of student affairs research in 1995. Henning & Elling (2007) found that 82 institutions employed a professional dedicated to coordinating assessment across the division of student affairs; most were located at four-year public and private institutions with higher enrollment. This number has grown to 138 in 2017 (T. Elling, personal communication, March 31 2017). This is a significant investment of resources and it shows a trend in how divisions of student affairs are approaching the challenge of implementing assessment across the division in a way that establishes a culture of assessment.

Student affairs assessment leaders turn to the student affairs assessment literature for guidance in approaching the daunting task of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment across an entire division. The extant literature has three emphases: rationale, mechanics, and guidance for leaders. The literature focused on rationale urges student affairs practitioners to engage in the assessment of student learning. Upcraft and Schuh began sounding this call in 1996 and many scholars (e.g., Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie, 2016) continue to encourage the field to demonstrate the quality of student learning in the co-curricular setting. The prevalence of scholars' continued calls for assessment in the literature over this 20-year period is evidence that the field is slow to adopt assessment. The literature focused on the mechanics of assessment includes many examples of how to conduct assessment in student affairs such as how to write learning outcomes, how to create an assessment plan, appropriate methods for collecting data and so on (Bresciani,

Gardner, & Hickmott, 2010; Henning & Roberts, 2016; Schuh, Biddix, Dean & Kinzie, 2016). The literature focused on guidance for leaders is very recent and is pitched at senior student affairs officers and student affairs assessment leaders (Bingham, Bureau, Garrison Duncan, 2015; Schuh, 2013; Yousey-Elsener, Bentrim, Henning, 2015). These three areas of the literature are useful to a student affairs assessment leader in that this individual needs to be knowledgeable about the rationale for assessment and the mechanics of assessment in order to practice it and instruct others. The more current literature also provides guidance for these emerging student affairs assessment leader positions and divisional leadership. Largely, this literature is based on valuable practitioner experience however it can be strengthened through empirical study.

Student affairs is equipped with long standing values, investment of resources, and literature; however, all of this guidance and support has not led to widespread adoption of the important practice of assessing co-curricular learning and using results for improvement (Blimling, 2013; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2010; Elkins, 2015). Framing the process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs as a change process and conducting empirical study on this topic can help practitioners better understand the change process, and how student affairs assessment leaders' actions, as well as structural, cultural, and agentive factors influence this change. This study will fill the knowledge gap in the student affairs assessment literature by addressing the following research questions:

- How does a culture of assessment in student affairs change as the result of an assessment leader's actions?

- How do structural, cultural, and agentic factors influence the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a student affairs culture of assessment?

A student affairs culture of assessment is defined as a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an ongoing, embedded practice of data collection and analysis that informs decision-making for the purpose of continuously improving programs and services at all levels of the organization.² This definition assumes that the programs and services are designed to support not only the outcomes associated with the individualistic perspective such as retention and graduation but also the holistic learning and development outcomes associated with the common good perspective.

Study Overview

Using process tracing, a procedure used to examine a process and identify connections between factors and an outcome (Vennesson, 2013, p. 224), this single case study examined the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in a division of student affairs at a four-year university in the Western United States. I interviewed the current and previous divisional student affairs assessment leader (SAAL) as well as other members of the division using a grounded theory approach to understand how the culture of assessment changes in response to the SAAL's actions as well as in response to structural, cultural, and agentic factors. Document analysis of related materials describing the division's co-curricular assessment efforts were used to triangulate interview data.

² This definition was derived from a three-round Delphi study including 11 experts in the student affairs assessment field. For more information see Appendix A.

In the following chapters, I discuss the process and outcomes of the study. In chapter two, I discuss the contributions of current scholarship to understanding the change process in fostering and sustaining a student affairs culture of assessment, outline relevant theories that together inform the problem and insights into addressing the change process, define the factors that influence the change process identified in the study, and finally, bound the study by defining the starting and ending points for the change process.

In chapter three, I describe the study's design and methodology. In this qualitative case study, I utilized process tracing and a grounded theory approach to collect and analyze the interview data and documents I reviewed to support the findings. The study included 11 interview participants and 281 documents as well as information provided publicly on the institutional website. I discuss my data collection and analysis procedures, the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness, my role as a researcher, and the limitations of the study.

In chapters four and five, I present the findings of the study broken into two parts. The study examined the change process over the span of 22 years, chapter four covers the first roughly 16 years of the change process and chapter five discusses the remaining six years. Across the two chapters, I organize the findings in a timeline of the key milestones in the change process and identify how the milestones represent the influence of structural, cultural, and agentic factors, the interaction among the three factors, and additional influential factors identified through this study that are not considered structural, cultural, or agentic factors.

In chapter six, the final chapter, I summarize the findings of the study, identify implications for practice and future research, discuss study significance and limitations, and conclude the manuscript.

Key Terms

Some terms utilized throughout the dissertation may be unfamiliar to the reader. I summarize and briefly define some of the key terms utilized in the higher education and student affairs context.

1. Assessment – “the ongoing process of (1) establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning, (2) ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes, (3) systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations, and (4) using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning” (Suskie, 2009, pp. 3-4).
2. Assessment Council – a group of student affairs professionals working together to advance the assessment culture and practice of members of the division of student affairs. This group is also referred to as an Assessment Committee or Team.
3. Change – for the purpose of this study, change encompasses adaptation, isomorphism, and innovation and is defined as the continuous process of organizational evolution in which leaders intentionally implement new directions (Kezar, 2014, p. xii) that influence actors to “reweave their web of beliefs and habits of action to accommodate new experiences obtained through interaction” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 570).

4. Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) – the faculty or administrator responsible for leading the student affairs efforts at an institution. This position often reports to the president or provost and is a member of the institutional leadership team.
5. Co-curricular – learning experiences, programs, or services that typically occur outside the classroom and augment learning that takes place in the academic setting. Co-curricular learning experiences are often supported by student affairs staff.
6. Co-curricular assessment – the practice of assessing co-curricular learning experiences, programs, and services.
7. Culture of Assessment in Student Affairs – a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an ongoing, embedded practice of data collection and analysis that informs decision-making for the purpose of continuously improving programs and services at all levels of the organization (See Appendix A).
8. Student Affairs Assessment Leader (SAAL) – an individual with all of a portion of their time dedicated to coordinating assessment in the division of student affairs.
9. Unit - a group of individuals employed within the larger student affairs organization pursuing a common purpose, also commonly referred to as a department. This group often reports to a unit head which is responsible for carrying out the group's purpose.

Significance

This study provides insight into whether those in the student affairs assessment leader position, or others, have changed the assessment culture within a division of student affairs, and how. It also discerns whether structural, cultural, and other agentive factors support or interfere with the change process. This insight makes the process of changing culture more transparent to others in these positions and expedites progress toward effectively demonstrating what students learn through their co-curricular experiences. The findings provide practitioners with an empirically based understanding of the change process and seek to expedite student affairs assessment leader efforts at other institutions. The study also contributes to the student affairs assessment literature in defining a student affairs culture of assessment and offering groundwork for future studies in this area. The next chapter discusses the relevant literature related to this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are a few studies relevant to the process of change in cultures of assessment in the current student affairs assessment scholarship. First, Bresciani (2002) underscored the commonly cited barriers to assessment and explored the extent to which chief student affairs officers engaged external partners (e.g., consultants or national surveys) in student affairs assessment. She found that this decision varied by institution and can serve as a possible support when it fits the institution. Second, Green, Jones, and Aloï (2008) studied best practices in student affairs assessment and found that multi-level commitment from the chief student affairs officer, student affairs assessment leader, unit-level staff, and an assessment committee is needed to successfully implement assessment. They recommend a decentralized model of assessment facilitated by a coordinator or director who acknowledges that unit-level professionals are experts in their particular fields (p. 153). And finally, Seagraves & Dean (2010) studied conditions that support assessment practice at small colleges in the southeastern U.S. They identified four conditions that support assessment practice – support from the senior student affairs officer, informal expectations, viewing assessment as a means for improvement, and a collegial atmosphere (pp. 314-316).

These studies allude to the factors identified for this study that influence the process of fostering and sustaining a student affairs culture of assessment: structure, culture, and agency. Bresciani's (2002) study points to the importance of divisional culture as a factor influencing a student affairs assessment culture, divisional leaders must understand the divisional culture to determine if external partners will support or

interfere with a culture of assessment. Green, Jones, and Aloï's (2008) study highlights agency and structure as factors influencing a culture of assessment, they identify support from leadership at all levels as important for the practice of assessment as well as structures such as a student affairs assessment leader position and assessment committee. Seagraves and Dean's (2010) study emphasized agency and culture as factors that influence a student affairs culture of assessment. Support from the chief student affairs officer and how staff view assessment are examples of agency and culture. The findings from these three studies support structure, culture, and agency as factors influencing a culture of assessment although they don't use it as an explicit framework or any other theory as a framework.

These three studies contribute to the student affairs assessment literature however there are some limitations in their findings. The latter two studies' findings are focused on specific institution types within higher education. Green, Jones, and Aloï (2008) studied three large research institutions and Seagraves and Dean (2010) studied three small liberal arts institutions in the southeastern U.S. While the purpose of case studies is to generalize analytically rather than statistically (Yin, 2014, p. 21), the unique contexts studied in these cases should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. For example, Green, Jones, and Aloï recommend a position be dedicated to coordinating assessment in the division. Adding a position may be viable for large research institutions but may be more challenging for small colleges such as those studied by Seagraves and Dean. These challenges may be due to differences in size, complexity, staffing levels, and resources in the institution types studied, some possible intervening factors in the process of change. Seagraves and Dean indicate that informal expectations

work better than more formalized ones in the context they studied. This may indicate that divisional cultures vary by institution type and size. These studies touch on the factors influencing the change process that will be examined in this study (structure, culture, and agency), however, they do not explore the *process of change* associated with establishing and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. The purpose of this study is to examine the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs using a theoretical framework established for studying reform in the K-12 system as well as organizational change theories contextualized in the higher education setting.

Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System

Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) based their theoretical framework, Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System, on several propositions to explain the change process in the K-12 setting. They explain in their study of the scaling up of education reform that first, educational reform is a co-constructed and social process rather than a “unidirectional, technical, and rational” (2002, p. 10) one. Second, given the first assumption, the study of change or reform lends itself well to qualitative research because it allows the researcher to more fully understand the complex and messy process in a deeper way than other methods. Third, Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) embrace the relational sense of context which emphasizes the interaction between individual and context as multi-directional, rather than the embedded sense of context which emphasizes unidirectional interaction leading to constraints or influences at other levels (pp. 12-13). Fourth, power and perspective play a role in how the change occurs and while not equal for all, an effort to capture all perspectives is valued over capturing

only some. These propositions inform both their approach to the research as well as the mediational system that serves as the theoretical framework for their study of the K-12 school reform scaling up process, see Figure 1.

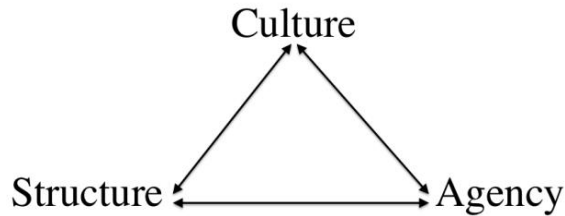


Figure 1. Culture, structure, and agency as a mediational system (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002).

These propositions are also relevant to this study despite the difference in context, from the K-12 setting to the higher education setting, in three ways. First, change in higher education is also co-constructed as a social process and can best be understood from a qualitative stance to capture the richness of the reflexivity of the multiple factors involved and how the individuals involved make meaning of these factors and their interaction. Second, regarding a sense of context, this study operates from the assumption that many factors influence the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. And, that these factors influence one another to leverage change. This perspective endorses a relational rather than embedded sense of context. And finally, similar to the K-12 setting, power and perspective influence the change process in the higher education context. This study is designed to capture multiple perspectives from different organizational levels to capture and analyze similarities and differences among these perspectives.

While these propositions transcend contexts, the higher education context embodies distinctive organizational features which are important to understand. As such,

in addition to using the Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002), as a theoretical frame, I also used organizational change theory grounded in the higher education setting (Kezar, 2014) to inform the design of the study. The next section discusses some of these distinctive features.

Higher Education as a Distinct Organizational Context

Many scholars have established that higher education is a unique organizational context (Bergquist, 1992; Birnbaum, 1988; Manning, 2013; Winston, 1998) and as such, the application of organizational and organizational change theory must account for these distinctive elements of the enterprise. Kezar (2001, pp. 59-77) summarizes some of the distinguishing features of higher education that influence organizational change. For the purpose of this study, I focus on those most relevant to the student affairs context: institutional status, values-driven, loosely coupled system, organized anarchical decision-making, employee commitment and tenure, and goal ambiguity.

Institutional status. Higher education is an institution and this institutional status is a factor in the change process. From the sociological perspective, institutions are dependent on both local and broader environments, which form the main features of the institution itself (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2007, pp. 187-188). Colleges and universities are legitimized by one another, governmental influence, as well as professional organizations such as the Association of American University Professors (AAUP). They were established as a social institution to serve the public good and therefore they influence and are influenced by the communities they serve. These elements of institutions lead to isomorphism as evidenced by the commonly accepted understanding of the outputs of higher education: graduates and research.

Values-driven. As an institution, higher education is influenced by values; some that traverse the enterprise, and some that contradict one another within it. For example, some values that are espoused across colleges and universities are the primacy of research and academic freedom (Bergquist, 1992, pp. 22-27). However, within the academic disciplines, contradicting values in terms of ways of knowing emerge. For example, the social sciences emphasize constructivism while the physical sciences embrace positivism. And within the subcultures of an individual university, different values surface among for example the managerial culture and the developmental cultures (Bergquist, 1992).

Loosely coupled systems. Higher education systems are loosely coupled, the different components within this type of system interact but are not heavily influenced by one another and retain individuated identities (Weick, 1976, p. 3). As an example, the academic governing body of an institution influences the different academic departments through policy setting and decision-making yet, each department preserves its own distinct entity while remaining part of the same organization.

Employee commitment and tenure. Another feature of higher education that influences the change process is the long-term employment commitment of many administrative staff and tenure for faculty. Change often involves new concepts, practices, and roles. When employees are part of an organization for a long period of time, they embody the underlying assumptions, values, and norms of the culture (Schein, 2010, pp. 13-21). Culture often operates at the implicit level and employees may not be fully aware of its influence on their actions. Second-order change attempts to alter these

elements to make way for a new set of values and assumptions (Kezar, 2014). If cultural assumptions, values, and norms are tacit, long-term employees may resist change.

Goal ambiguity. Colleges and universities often have lofty goals that are difficult to measure and can make change processes challenging. Institutional level goals are considered espoused theories and they represent the broad goals or mission for the entire organization. Theories-in-use reflect the practices actually carried out by the individuals employed at the institution and they may or may not be aligned with the espoused theory (Argyris & Schön, 1996, pp. 12-14). For example, a university may espouse the value of social justice in its mission statement yet the day-to-day policies and practices that govern the treatment of its employees (theories-in-use) may reveal a different value.

Organized anarchical decision-making. Several of the features just discussed contribute to organized anarchical decision-making. When goals are broad and open to differing interpretation and systems are loosely coupled, decision-making tends to happen at local rather than systematic levels. Authority and power are interpreted differently depending on which cultural lens is applied. For example, in Bergquist's (1992) collegial culture, community members value shared power and authority and so decision-making is unclear. And in the managerial culture, power and authority are more clearly articulated through hierarchical structures (pp. 17-92). These differences can contribute to confusion and localized decision-making that may or may not be aligned with the institution's espoused values.

All of these features of higher education as an institution make change more interconnected across the higher education enterprise than just the individual institution undergoing the change. This interconnectedness influences the application of

organizational and organizational change theory. These features of higher education connect to the propositions underlying the Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System model (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan, 2002). First, the co-constructed and social proposition connects to the institutional status and loosely coupled system features of higher education in that the context in which the institution exists influences its goals and how it operates. And the loosely coupled system feature emphasizes the social and variably co-constructed nature of the subsystems within an institution. Second, the proposition that qualitative research can more deeply capture and reflect the change process carries through to the higher education context as well. Where context matters, values and goals have an influence, and the interactions of systems are involved, qualitative methods offer a richer mechanism than other methods. Third, the proposition that a relational sense of context is more appropriate is reflective of the higher education setting as well. Loosely coupled systems and organized anarchical decision-making reflect a multi-dimensional rather than unidirectional interaction. And fourth, the power and perspective proposition connects to the employee commitment and tenure feature in the higher education setting in that often employees with long standing and those who hold tenured positions acquire power and the loosely coupled feature produces multiple perspectives.

One difference in the use of the Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System framework is that Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) apply the framework to a much larger context, a macroculture, than the focus of this study, a subculture, as described by Schein (2010, pp. 1-2). As such, the definitions of structure, culture, and agency vary a bit between the two studies. Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) refer to

structure as structural constraints, and culture as the culture of the school engaging in the reform, and define agency as “the capacity to change the existing state of affairs – a capacity which all people have regardless of how they choose to exercise it” (p. 62).

They further indicated that agency can be supportive of, resistant to, or passive in relation to the reform. The next section defines structure, culture, and agency as factors for change in this study.

Structure

The first factor that influences the change process, structure, includes processes and policies, the relationship between student affairs and other elements of the institutional organization, as well as organizational structures within the division of student affairs. Processes and policies document how assessment will be conducted, how data will be reported, and the extent to which practices are embedded rather than superfluous. The organizational structure within the division of student affairs affects how the SAAL can lead; the title and reporting lines of the student affairs assessment leader influences how the leader operates in terms of available strategies, level of empowerment, and relationships. These connections between agency and structure reinforce the reflexivity component of the Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan model (2002).

Indicators of structural influences on the process of change for the purpose of this study include policies, procedures, and practices related to assessment activity; the presence of an assessment team or similar group; resources in the form of personnel, professional development, and funding for changes indicated by assessment results; items related to the organizational structure such as the SAAL reporting line, relationship with divisional leadership and units in the division; and communication strategies related to

assessment. These indicators informed my interview guide and I looked for evidence of their influence on the change process while collecting and analyzing data.

Culture

The second factor that influences the change process is culture. Cultural theorists embrace three different perspectives regarding the study of culture: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. The integration perspective assumes a “mutually consistent interpretation” of culture, the differentiation perspective assumes “inconsistent interpretations,” and the fragmentation perspective assumes that “cultural manifestations are ambiguously related to one another” (Martin, 2002, p. 94). This study approaches culture from the integration perspective with an openness to the differentiation and fragmentation perspectives because I am focusing on a subculture (Schein, 2010, p. 2), within a higher education institution, specifically the student affairs division. If the study were broader and focusing on a macro or institutional culture, the other perspectives may be more appropriate because macro or institutional levels of culture would likely introduce more complexity which may lead to less consistent reflections of culture among groups or weaker relationships among those reflections. While this study takes the integration perspective, the study design feature of gathering evidence from different levels of the organization within the subculture of student affairs (e.g., student affairs assessment leader, divisional leadership, unit staff) and comparing each interview individually and between levels allows for interpretations from all three cultural lenses.

As with the other constructs (structure and agency), scholars do not agree on a common definition of culture. For the purpose of this study, culture is defined as a set of commonly held underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that consciously or

unconsciously influence the behavior of the members of the organization and the organization as an entity (Schein, 2010). Culture includes both institutional and divisional culture as they both shape the student affairs culture of assessment. While common features exist across the higher education enterprise, institutional culture differs by institution and certain cultures are more hospitable to a culture of assessment (Birnbaum, 1988). Similarly, student affairs divisions can take on cultural features more or less open to fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment (Bergquist, 1992).

Indicators that the culture factor influences the change process include evidence of underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions operating to influence behavior; history and traditions of the institution and the division that influence behavior, values, beliefs, and assumptions; and other possible elements of the divisional or institutional culture that support or interfere with the change process. To uncover these indicators, I focused some of my interview questions on these topics and as an outsider, someone who is not part of the culture and therefore able to bring an objective perspective, I was well positioned to identify them. During interviews and through my analysis, I attended to the presence of social cognition theories (Kezar, 2014) in how the SAAL understands and addresses resistance to change. Social cognition theories offer explanations about why members of an organization resist change and offer strategies to address this resistance.

Agency

Agency is the third factor that influences the change process. Agency operates at the institutional, divisional, unit, and the student affairs assessment leader levels and individuals from each level can influence the change process. Leaders at the institutional and divisional levels influence priorities and resources toward or away from assessment.

This can have a strong effect on the culture of assessment in student affairs as it expands or limits the potential of the student affairs assessment leader. Leaders in the division that supervise the staff implementing assessment can support or interfere with assessment efforts in terms of how they hold staff accountable for carrying out assessment. Leaders at the unit level can take actions that embed assessment into their practice or consider it an “add-on” or something they will avoid at all costs. The student affairs assessment leader’s actions related to helping the division learn assessment practices, understanding the divisional and institutional culture, and interests, conflicts, and power in the division can support or interfere with the culture of assessment. Figure 2 is a sample organizational chart that illustrates the different organizational levels considered in this study.

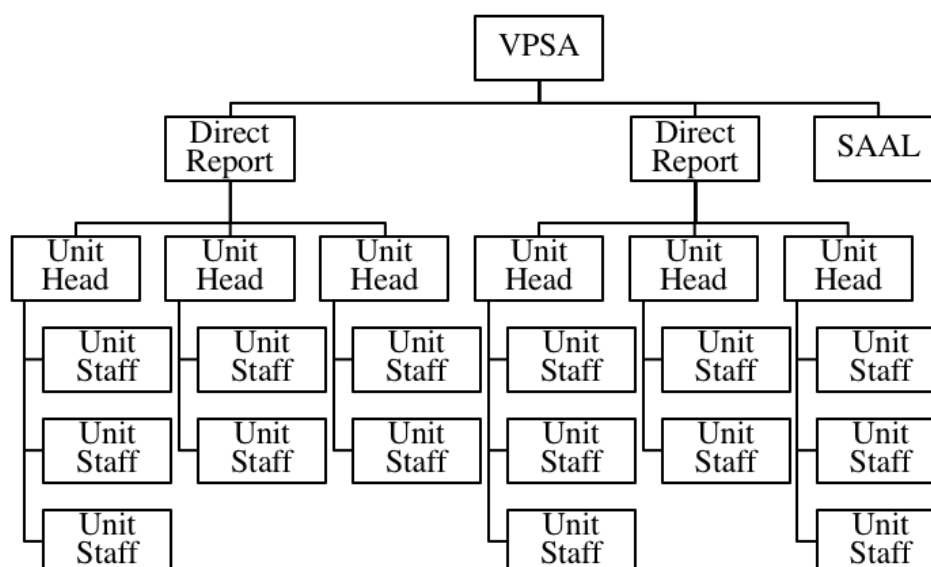


Figure 2. Sample organizational chart depicting the organizational levels used in this study. VPSA refers to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs or the chief student affairs officer, this is the person who leads the division as a whole and reports to an institutional leader such as the Provost or President. Direct reports refers to divisional leaders that report directly to the VPSA and supervise units in the division. SAAL refers to the Student Affairs Assessment Leader, this is the person responsible for leading and coordinating assessment efforts for the division. Unit Head refers to an individual who leads the work of an individual unit in the division. Unit Staff refers to an individual who carries out the work of the unit.

Indicators that agentive factors influence the change process include vocal, financial, or other forms of support from divisional and institutional leadership; actions taken at the divisional and unit level to actively support assessment; actions taken to shape shared language and values; the extent to which the leader's approach matches the divisional and institutional culture; actions taken to ensure learning and sensemaking at the individual, unit, and division levels; and actions taken that suggest political theories such as framing, power, interest alignment, and conflict.

The Reflexivity of Structure, Culture, and Agency and Other Possible Factors

While it is important to define each factor and indicators of its presence in the change process, it is also critical to acknowledge that structure, culture, and agency are co-constructed and their interaction is another influence on the change process (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). For example, the structure of a student affairs organization determines whether or not a student affairs assessment leader position exists in the division or if the duties are dispersed among others in the division. How reporting lines are defined, communication is handled, and relationships of the SAAL position to other positions in the division and institution are all structural features that can influence the change process. This divisional structure is heavily influenced by the divisional and institutional culture; the culture determines the level of hierarchy and silos within the organization. Both the structure and culture influence the level of agency the student affairs assessment leader has and the repertoire of actions available to the leader. This example reflects the co-construction of structure, culture, and agentive factors on the change process. Not only does each factor influence the change process individually but their interaction, a separate factor, influences the change process. The purpose of this

study is to examine the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs using Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System as one theoretical framework.

In addition to structure, culture, and agency, the extant literature (Jones, Aloia, & Green, 2008; Seagraves & Dean, 2010) suggests that some possible intervening variables such as institutional type and control, accreditation region, and length of the change process may also have an influence on the change process and serve to identify possible rival explanations. First, SAAL positions are more prevalent at four-year public and private institutions with larger enrollments (Henning & Elling, 2007). These institutions may have structures, resources, and cultures that support the change process that differ from other institution types. Second, regional accreditation standards vary in terms of attention to co-curricular assessment and learning so this may explain another influence on the change process. Third, the duration of the change process may have an influence as well. I remained open to evidence supporting these explanations as well as the emergence of others during data collection and analysis.

Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System, served as a foundational framework for this study. Organizational change theory grounded in the higher education setting provides a strong complement to Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) work for two reasons. First, Kezar's six schools of thought on organizational change in higher education provide multiple lenses that were used to identify indicators of each of the structural, cultural, and agentic factors used in this study. And second, Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) framework was derived from the K-12 setting and higher education as an enterprise embodies distinctive

organizational features that Kezar's (2014) schools of thought take into account. Used together, Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System and Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought provide a more complete theoretical frame for this study.

Organizational Change Theory

Framing this study as a change process will expand and deepen the maturing student affairs assessment literature in addressing the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a student affairs assessment culture. Organizational change theories grounded in the higher education setting complements Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) model and offers a multi-faceted perspective on the complex process of change in higher education. It brings an important theoretical framework to the current student affairs assessment literature that to date is informed mostly by best practice. Organizational change theories help to more specifically define the structural, cultural, and agentive factors established for this study and identify the indicators of their influence on the process of change. This section begins with the definition of change used in this study.

Change

Many terms define how an organization moves from one state to another such as (1) adaptation, an organization responds to changes in the environment; (2) isomorphism, an organization imitates others in the enterprise; (3) innovation or reform, an organization implements a new initiative (Kezar, 2014, pp. xi-xii). However, a commonly accepted definition of change does not exist in the literature. For the purpose of this study, change encompasses adaptation, isomorphism, and innovation and is defined as the continuous

process of organizational evolution in which leaders intentionally implement new directions (Kezar, 2014, p. xii) that influence actors to “reweave their web of beliefs and habits of action to accommodate new experiences obtained through interaction” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 570). This definition is a combination of Kezar’s broad conception of change and Tsoukas and Chia’s connection to the cultural and sensemaking (Weick, 1995) elements of change. This study focuses on the process of change in the context of culture so this combination of ideas about change will serve as an important frame in understanding both the actions of the leader and how others accommodate these new experiences into meaning. This approach emphasizes the evolving process of change rather than the static, synoptic states of organization viewed as stages of change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Organizational change processes can be defined as first- or second-order in scope. First-order change involves slight modifications to current practice whereas second-order change involves addressing “underlying values, assumptions, structures, processes, and culture” (Kezar, 2014, p. 49). For example, the appointment of a student affairs assessment leader to coordinate assessment for the division would be considered a first-order change, if the appointment is missing some other elements. This appointment would be considered a second-order change if it is accompanied by other key elements such as a divisional commitment to learning new skills and ways of working, examining and addressing underlying values and beliefs that might undermine assessment efforts, demonstrated commitment from divisional leadership, and a view that assessment is a shared practice (second-order) versus the responsibility of the assessment leader (first-order).

Different theories of change provide distinctive explanations about the process and scope of change. Kezar (2014) organized these theories into six schools of thought within the higher education context. This taxonomy provides multiple lenses through which to analyze and approach fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. Three of the six schools of thought are associated with first-order change: scientific management, evolutionary, and institutional and three are associated with second-order change: cultural, social cognition, and political (Kezar, 2014, pp. 22-41). I will outline the key features of each school of thought next.

The first, *scientific management*, is based on assumptions that organizations are purposeful and adaptive and that leaders are change agents who instigate the change process which is logical. Change is viewed as positive and includes key features - planning, assessment, analysis, strategy, and structural approaches to change (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, pp. 515-517). The *evolutionary* school of thought, contrasts scientific management in that a key feature of these models and theories is that change is the response to external, rather than internal, factors. Change is viewed as something that naturally happens over time in response to changes in the open system between the organization and its environment (Morgan, 2006, pp. 34-38). Change is deterministic, and leaders have little to do with initiating or managing the process. The third school of thought, *institutional*, shares some features of the evolutionary approach in that basic assumptions include acknowledging, for example, higher education as a social institution in the context of the larger society or system. It recognizes the various sources of influence on higher education as an institution such as the federal government and

professional organizations, and it questions the agency of an organization to change on its own accord within this context (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, introduction).

The *political* school of thought, evolved from the following assumptions about change: positions or ideals exist within an organization along with its polar opposite and conflict is an inherent element of human interaction (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004, p. 517). As individuals or groups hold different perspectives and interests in the organization, change agents use negotiation, bargaining, consciousness raising, persuasion, influence, and power to accelerate or reduce conflict that may lead to change (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 181). Within these political models, leaders embody an activist role to gain or preserve power and privilege, and change is not necessarily viewed as advancing the organization, nor is it rational.

The *social cognition* school of thought shifts the focus of change away from the organization to the individual and holds the primary assumption that individuals and their thought processes influence how leaders understand and enact change (Martin, 2002, pp. 151-152). Sensemaking is one of the core concepts informing the social cognition school of thought. Weick (1995) described sensemaking as a process whereby individuals (such as those involved in a change process) derive meaning. The seven properties of sensemaking are (1) meaning is influenced by the constantly evolving construction of the sensemaker's identity, (2) retrospection, and (3) the sensemaker's contribution to the environment about which one is making sense. Sensemaking is a (4) social practice in that feedback is a central component, it is (5) ongoing, and (6) the sensemaker focuses on "extracted cues" or elements of a concept rather than the entire concept. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, (7) sensemaking is "driven by plausibility rather than

accuracy” in that the sensemaker focuses on whether the new meaning is reasonable rather than whether it is exact and complete in the process of making meaning (pp. 17-62). The social cognition school of thought emphasizes the role of learning throughout the process of change and points to the complexity and duration of second-order change.

The *cultural* school of thought shares some features with social cognition: the focus includes both the individual and the organization, it involves changing one’s values and beliefs, and it tends to be enduring, irrational, erratic, and dynamic (Simsek & Louis, 1994, pp. 670-672). From the cultural perspective, change can be deliberate or unplanned, can move the organization forward or backward, and can involve intended and unintended effects. Some models focus on the leader’s ability to create change via actions that alter others’ values, beliefs, myths, or traditions (Schein, 2010) where other models characterize change as more natural acknowledging that culture is constantly evolving in response to the human environment (Morgan, 2006, pp. 116-188).

Kezar (2014) identified implementing assessment as a second-order change (p. 50) because it involves examining and refining underlying values and beliefs, learning new information and meaning-making, and understanding interests, conflict, and power; therefore, I will use these latter three schools of thought that focus on second-order change to identify indicators associated with each factor of the change process: structure, culture, and agency. Taking the perspective that the change process of fostering and sustaining a student affairs culture of assessment is a second-order change requires the integration of the cultural, social cognition, and political schools of thought. Each school of thought emphasizes different elements of the complex change process. For example, social cognition theories focus on the individual level of change whereas cultural theories

focus on the collective level of change. To fully examine the change process, it is necessary to apply all three lenses to understand the factors, structure, culture, and agency, and their related indicators involved in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. The indicators for each of the three factors, described above, are derived by applying the three schools of thought associated with second-order change: cultural, social cognition, and political. I designed Figure 3 to illustrate the relationship between the indicators for each of the factors, structure, culture, and agency, and three of Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought. The figure shows that the three schools of thought overlap and similarly that some of the indicators represent more than one factor. For example, an assessment team is an indicator for structure that can have political or social cognition features or both. These indicators informed my interview questions and served as the framework for evidence of the influences on the change process. Following Schein's (2010) assumption that the leader has agency in fostering and sustaining change in culture, I used these three perspectives to frame the SAAL's actions as well as indicators of the three factors influencing the change process identified for this study.



Figure 3. Factor and indicator alignment with three of Kezar's six schools of thought (2014). This figure lists the indicators for each of the three factors in this study: structure, culture, and agency as they relate to three of Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought regarding organizational change theory: cultural, social cognition, and political. Each school of thought highlights different indicators for the factors. Indicators related to structure are listed in regular font, indicators related to culture are italicized, and indicators related to agency are bolded.

The Conceptual Model

This study examines the process of change involved in fostering and sustaining a student affairs culture of assessment. The focus is the change process occurring between point (A) – a starting point for culture of assessment, and point (B) – an established culture of assessment. These two points are not factors in the study, rather, they are two

points that bound the study. Student affairs culture of assessment is defined as a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an ongoing, embedded practice of data collection and analysis that informs decision making for the purpose of continuously improving programs and services at all levels of the organization (See Appendix A). The case was selected because it represents the characteristics of this definition. Based on the extant literature, I anticipated that three factors, structure, culture, and agency, as well as their reflexive relationship, influence the change process. Figure 4 illustrates the anticipated relationships among the factors and the change process as well as the indicators of these factors described above. This study will fill the knowledge gap in the student affairs assessment literature by offering insights into the complex change process associated with fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. These insights will better support student affairs assessment leaders in this work on their local campuses to hopefully accelerate their efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessing. These insights may also be applicable to other change processes in the higher education context as well.

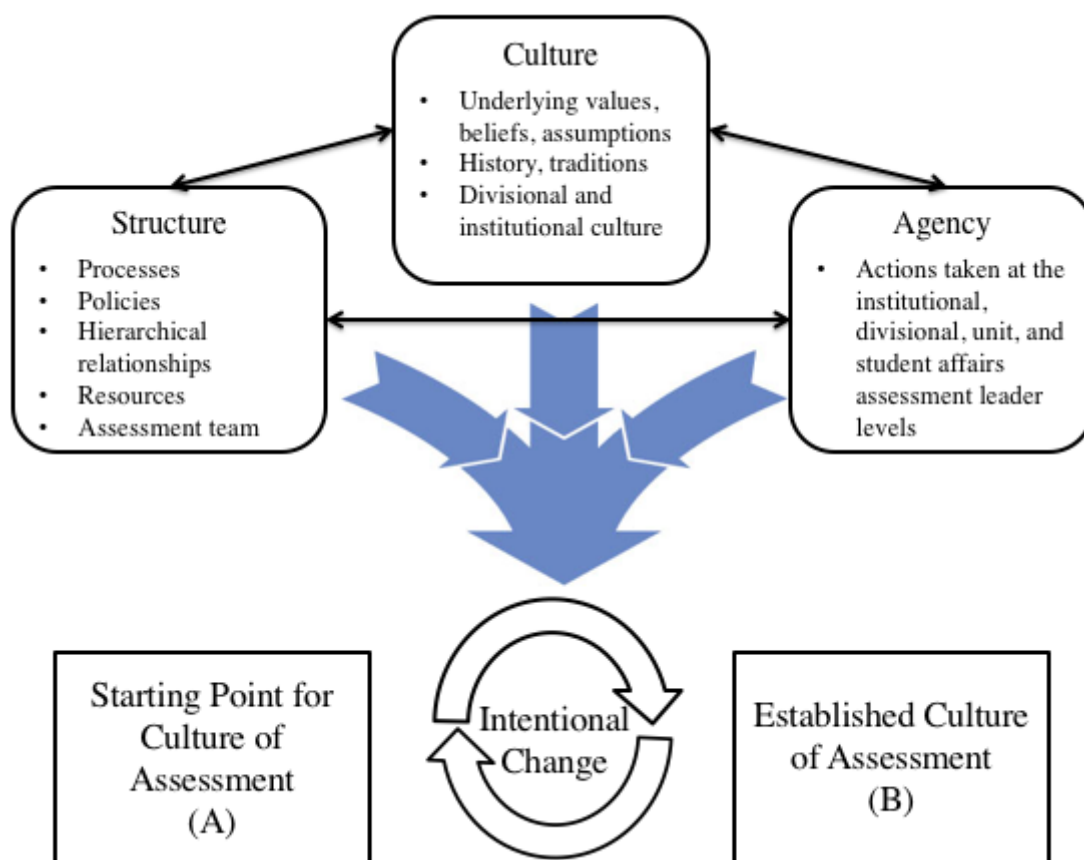


Figure 4. Factors influencing the change process in fostering and sustaining a student affairs culture of assessment. Based on Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002.

Having discussed the relationship of the factors involved in the study, the next chapter outlines research already completed – a Delphi study (See Appendix A) to develop a definition of student affairs culture of assessment; establish the logic that links the research question, sources of evidence, and method for the study including discussion of the strengths and limitations of the case study method and how they are addressed in this specific design; and review the specific procedures used to carry out the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Already Completed

Because a common definition of culture of assessment in student affairs does not exist and this is the context of this study, I conducted a Delphi study including 11 experts in the student affairs assessment field. Since the current level of knowledge and research regarding student affairs assessment culture is not adequate to address the research question and a definition of culture of assessment is needed, the Delphi method was an appropriate approach (Linstone & Turroff, 2002, p. 3-4). The three-round study yielded the following definition and a set of characteristics of student affairs culture of assessment: “A student affairs culture of assessment is defined as a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an ongoing, embedded practice of data collection and analysis that informs decision-making for the purpose of continuously improving programs and services at all levels of the organization.” Please refer to Appendix A for a full description of the Delphi study.

Research Design

This explanatory single case study examines the influence of three factors, structure, culture, and agency and their co-constructed nature on the process of change in the context of a student affairs division that has fostered and sustained a culture of assessment. Framing this study as a change process involved connecting two important theoretical frames. First, I used Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan’s (2002) Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System as a theoretical framework in the design of this study. They found that structure, culture, and agentive factors, as well as their

interaction, influenced the change process in their study of scaling up educational reform in the K-12 setting. Because Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) study took place in the K-12 context and this study involves the higher education context, I also utilized a second theoretical framework: Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought on organizational change in higher education. I adopted Kezar's (2014) assertion that implementing assessment is a second-order change (p. 50), one that requires examining and refining underlying values and beliefs, learning new information and meaning-making, and understanding interests, conflict, and power. Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought ameliorated any limitations associated with applying Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's framework from the K-12 setting to the higher education setting. Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought served as lenses through which to derive indicators of structure, culture, and agentive factors in the change process for this study.

In this section, I will discuss the rationale for the case study method, the strengths and challenges of case study design in the context of this specific study, rationale for the case selection, the unit of analysis – the change process, and evidence collection and evaluation strategies.

Strengths of Case Study Design

Case study design is appropriate to address research questions investigating how a phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2014), in this case, *how* student affairs cultures of assessment change as the result of the assessment leader's actions as well as the influence of structural, cultural, and agentive factors. Additionally, in this study, I did not have control over the change process and the topic is a current rather than historical event, two other conditions that align with case study design (Yin, 2014). One of the strengths of

case study design is the ability to study a phenomenon in-depth in the natural context rather than in a lab or investigated remotely (Yin, 2014). I conducted on-site interviews and observations at the institution, and my visit to the institution allowed me to gain a better understanding of the context and culture of the division than if I had not travelled to the site.

Process tracing is a procedure that fits well with case study design, it is well-suited to examine the change process because it allows the researcher to explore both the possible causal relationships (what) and the context in which they occurred (how) (Vennesson, 2013, p. 233). It complements case study well because it combines both a positivist and constructivist approach and situates the *what* and *how* of the process in the context of the actor's rationale, beliefs, and actions (Vennesson, 2013, pp. 232-233). The positivist lens involves identifying possible indicators of the factors influencing change in this study prior to collecting data, see Figure 3. The rich description and possible causal relationships yielded from this study will expand change theory to the student affairs assessment context and produce analytic rather than statistical generalizations (Yin, 2014, p. 21) that can be useful to other divisions of student affairs as they foster and sustain a culture of assessment.

Limitations of Case Study Design

One of the challenges of case study research is that it often examines phenomena with permeable boundaries between the subject and its context (Yin, 2014). In this study, the student affairs culture of assessment operates within a divisional as well as institutional culture, which influence one another. To mitigate this possible influence, I used process tracing and chronological sequencing (Yin, 2014) to develop an in-depth

understanding of the change process between point (A) – a starting point for a culture of assessment and the point where the division is currently operating in terms of fostering and sustaining their culture of assessment (B). See Figure 4. To effectively trace the process of change, factors must be clearly defined and operationalized (Collier, 2011, p. 823). In this case, the factors and change process are defined and operationalized in chapter two, see Figures 3 and 4. Another challenge in case study design involves reflexivity on behalf of the researcher and the participants. When conducting interviews, participants often have an interest in responding in a manner they perceive the researcher would like (Yin, 2014, p. 112). To help mitigate these issues, I carefully crafted my interview questions to avoid leading participants and asked two peer debriefers to review my questions in advance of data collection. These peer debriefers confirmed that the language utilized in the interview guides and questions were neutral.

Other challenges associated with case study design involve trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To address concerns about dependability, confirmability, and credibility, I have defined the factors in the study as well as the operational indicators associated with them (See chapter two and Figures 3 and 4). While this particular framework has not been applied in this context, the definitions and indicators are based on theory and practical experience. The study design includes multiple sources of evidence allowing for triangulation to corroborate findings, the creation of a case study database and chain of evidence so that peer debriefers and future researchers can trace the findings back to the original source(s) of evidence. I conducted member checking with a key informant to assess my interpretations and the extent to which they reflect participants' construction and meaning. The interview guide

(Appendix B) includes questions designed to elicit other possible influences on the change process to help me remain open to possible rival explanations.

The purpose of case study research is to make analytic rather than statistical generalizations (Yin, 2014, p. 21). However, this study's transferability is derived from its ability to apply organizational change theory to the process of change involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. Understanding this process in depth as well as exploring possible causal relationships between the factors and the change process will share important information for other institutions that are also engaging in the process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs.

There are also limitations associated with the sources of evidence I collected: documents, interviews, and observations. Documents can be biased and access can be limited (Yin, 2014). To address this concern, I analyzed each document with a critical lens identifying the author and possible motives for writing it. I worked with the student affairs assessment leaders to access needed documents and received cooperation in this regard, many of the documents I was seeking were available on their student affairs assessment website. Participants were very open to sharing relevant documents so this was not an issue. Interviews can involve response bias, reflexivity, and inaccuracies related to poor recall (Yin, 2014). To help mitigate these issues, I used a timeline of the change process to triangulate participants' accounts and focus my questions. I also carefully worded my questions to minimize response bias and reflexivity. Regarding observations, I used these as a supplement to the other sources of evidence so that if reflexivity and interviewer influence were present, I noted it through analytic memos.

The Case

The case for this study is Change University (CU), a public, land grant university serving approximately 32,000 primarily undergraduate students. CU is classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as a doctoral university with the highest research activity and selective admission. CU is fully accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and was most recently reaffirmed in 2011. The division of student affairs at Change University has been engaged in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in their division for the past 22 years. Because of its role as one of the early divisions of student affairs to engage in co-curricular assessment as well as the duration of their efforts, Change University is commonly known in the student affairs assessment field as having a strong culture of assessment which represents second-order change. The rationale for selecting this case is supported by both its critical and extreme characteristics (Yin, 2014, pp. 51-52). The case is critical to the theoretical framework, change, in that this case represents an example of a student affairs division that has achieved, by their own admission, second-order change in terms of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. The case is extreme in that it is one of the few cases that exists based on student affairs assessment scholars' continued calls to foster and sustain student affairs cultures of assessment (Blimling, 2013; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2010; Elkins, 2015). This case sheds light on the change process and offers insight to other divisions hoping to foster and sustain a culture of assessment.

The unit of analysis, the process of change, is bound by point (A), a starting point, and the current state (B); see Figure 4. Because change is a vague construct that is

difficult to define, it was important to keep in mind how change is defined in the context of this study as I collected data to ensure the description and possible causal inferences accurately represented the evidence and responded to the research questions. I used a process tracing framework to design the interview guides and organized interview questions according to the factors - structure, culture, and agency - and their related indicators to make them specific and relevant to the change process (Yin, 2014, pp. 31-34).

I collected data from six sources: documents, observation, the student affairs assessment leader, divisional leadership, unit staff, and those involved in the process who have left the division. I collected the documents both prior to visiting the site as well as during the visit. For example, the division has a statement about their approach to assessment, as I examined this document, I looked for indicators of each of the factors. I observed the organizational culture through chance interactions and during the time between interviews. I used Figure 3 as a guide to organize my observations regarding indicators for each of the factors. I also collected data via in-person interviews during my visit. I tailored my interview questions by group – student affairs assessment leader, divisional leadership, and unit staff. The questions were designed to both understand the change process from these various perspectives in the organization as well as determine if and how the factors influence the change process. The interview guides are included in Appendix B.

I triangulated evidence from these sources to ensure the findings were consistent. Because I am studying the process of change, I used a form of time-series analysis – chronological sequencing - as an analytical frame to describe the process and evaluate

causal relationships between the factors and the change process (Yin, 2014, pp. 150-155). This also informed how I collected and organized the data to ensure that it followed the logic of the study proposition, that is designed to determine how structure, culture, and agency influence the change process. Chronological sequencing fits well with process tracing in that they both may lead to the support of causal inferences. I established a timeline of key milestones in the change process by reviewing the information available on the institution's student affairs assessment website and consulting with the student affairs assessment leaders to serve as a reference point throughout data collection and analysis. As I collected interview data and documents, I revised and confirmed the timeline of key milestones. This timeline provided the opportunity to identify sequential significance of different events or note more influential periods of change. The connection between the indicators identified in chapter two and the interview guides was critical to ensure the evidence collected matched the study proposition.

Because the study involves change, culture, and agency, I approached this research with a constructivist epistemological perspective to acknowledge the varied perceptions of the phenomenon as well as its emergent features. It was important to remain responsive to changes in the design and contradictory evidence as the study unfolded. And while process tracing also includes some positivist influence in the interest of identifying possible causal relationships, a constructivist approach is needed to both identify, remain open to, and seek evidence for rival explanations. For example, as discussed, Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System served as a framework for this study. And while I identified specific indicators for each of these factors of change using Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought

(see Figure 3) summarizing organizational change in the higher education context, other indicators emerged through the study. If I maintained a strictly positivist stance, I may not have been open to seeing and interpreting these additional influences. This openness allowed me to adjust interview questions as needed during interviews so as not to limit other explanations from consideration.

Research Methods

Data Collection

Documents. Prior to visiting the site, I reviewed relevant documents describing the division's assessment culture and related policies and processes that were available on their assessment website. During my visit, I collected other documents that emerged through my interactions during the visit such as more specific documents that were not available publicly. I also learned of an institutional digital archive where the division catalogued relevant documents and I was able to access this digital archive and review the 281 submissions from student affairs regarding their assessment efforts.

Interviews. During my visit to the campus, I conducted a total of 13 in-person interviews with 11 different individuals including the current and former student affairs assessment leaders, a sample of unit staff who are also members of the Assessment Council, the current and former vice provosts for student affairs, as well as some involved in the process who have since left the division. Each of these groups provided a distinct perspective of the change process, I examined ways that these perspectives align, diverge, and conflict and investigated these points of convergence and divergence. I worked with the student affairs assessment leader to identify the appropriate number of individuals and combination of perspectives. I interviewed the current student affairs

assessment leader three times and the former assessment leader once. The first two interviews with the current student affairs assessment leader focused on establishing a timeline of the major milestones in the process of implementing assessment in the division. The first and second interviews lasted approximately one hour. Next, I interviewed the other 10 participants for an average of approximately 50 minutes each using the semi-structured interview guide included in Appendix B. Interview times ranged from 35 minutes to 70 minutes. Once I interviewed each of the other participants, I interviewed the current SAAL again to clarify questions that arose from the other interviews, this interview lasted 50 minutes. The total amount of interview time was approximately 10 hours and 15 minutes. I created a semi-structured interview guide for each of the participant groups, student affairs assessment leader, unit staff, and division leaders, see Appendix B. The semi-structured interview guide method allowed me to consider unanticipated and contradictory evidence by using judgment to adjust the questions as needed to try to gather the most relevant information to respond to the research question (Patton, 2015, pp. 437-442). During each interview I took notes, which helped with identifying follow up questions and probing questions during the interviews. It also allowed me to make notes of initial impressions from the interviews as I was collecting the data. I recorded each of the interviews using the RecUp application on my smartphone and I used a professional transcription service to transcribe each interview verbatim. Each transcript was checked for accuracy by editing the transcripts to correct typos, and fill in inaudible sections.

Data Analysis

Time-series analysis. Because the change process in this study spanned 22 years, I utilized chronological sequencing (Yin, 2014) to make sense of the many milestones associated with the change involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in CU's student affairs division. Utilizing a timeline of the process covering the period 1996-2011 that I obtained from the divisional assessment website as a starting point, I confirmed and added relevant information collected through document analysis and interviews. During the interviews, I asked each participant to share what they perceived to be the key milestones in the change process. The data from both the interviews and documents were used to triangulate and also build on the timeline available on the assessment website. This timeline served as a framework to identify milestones that were mentioned by multiple participants and differentiate which types of participants identified the variety of milestones. The timeline also helped to identify sequential relationships among the milestones and the length of time between milestones.

Interview data. I began pre-coding the interview data as I simultaneously listened to and reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and made any notations regarding non-verbal communication or emotions that I recalled from the interview (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 20-21). I uploaded each transcript to NVivo, the software I used to both organize and support data analysis. I organized each participant as a case and classified the level the individual served in the organization, the number of years the individual worked at the institution, the number of years the individual was part of the Student Affairs Assessment Council, and whether or not the individual worked at a different institution prior to this one. The Nvivo file serves as the case study database and chain of evidence.

For the first coding cycle, I analyzed each transcript line by line and used both a priori codes (i.e., structure, culture, and agency) and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016, p. 102-105) to identify emergent topics among the various interviews, and documents I reviewed. As I completed and then analyzed consecutive interviews, I used the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014, p. 132) to identify connections among the interviews within groups, across groups, with the timeline I compiled, and the documents I analyzed. I used analytic memos (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 170-171) throughout the coding and writing process to identify codes and refine my interpretations. After the first round of coding, I organized the codes under the parent codes of structure, culture, and agency, my a priori codes. Additionally, I identified how Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought intersect with each of the codes and labeled each code with one or more schools of thought using a mind map, see Table 1. Not all codes fit under the a priori codes, there were some emergent codes and utilizing a grounded theory approach allowed for them to surface in the data. For example, external influences was a code that developed in the analysis and was not initially identified as an indicator because I only utilized the three schools of thought (Kezar, 2014) most associated with second-order change (cultural, political, and social cognition) rather than all six. Had I included evolutionary or institutional theories of change to inform the factor indicators, 'external influences' may have initially been included as an indicator. The second cycle of coding focused on axial and pattern coding as well as splitting larger codes and aggregating smaller codes as needed (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout the process I used mind maps to visually display the data to assist in making inferences.

Table 1

Mind Map of Initial Codes Grouped Under A Priori Codes and Identified with Kezar's (2014) Six Schools of Thought

Structure	Culture	Agency	Other Codes
	Capacity building (SC) Communication and framing (SC) Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration (P, C) Contributing as a division to institutional picture (P, SM) Learning (SC) Learning community (SC) Top down and grassroots (P, C) Telling the story (SC)		Change and uncertainty (E) External influences (I, E) National trend in data importance (I, E) Sophistication (SC) From keeper of keys to helper of meaning making (SC) The final decision was cake (C)
Participation data (SM) Relationships (P) Reporting lines (P) Resource allocation (P) Assessment Council (P, SC) Processes (SC, SM) Policies (SC, SM) Positions (P)	From rote to meaningful (SC) Recognition (SC) Personal values (C) Underlying values, beliefs, assumptions (C) Pervasiveness of culture of assessment (C) Outcomes based assessment to big picture inquiry (SC) Institutional culture (C) Divisional culture (C) Resistance (SC) History (C) Traditions (C)	Tailored support (SC) Actions (C) Support from leadership (P) Actions – interest alignment and conflict (P) Approach matches the culture (C)	

Note. A priori codes are structure, culture, and agency, the 'other codes' column lists codes that do not align with an a priori code. Codes highlighted in grey align with multiple a priori codes. Codes are also identified with one or more of Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought. (C) Cultural, (SC) Social Cognition, (P) Political, (SM) Scientific Management, (I) Institutional, (E) Evolutionary.

To enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) I utilized a peer debriefer to review my coding process for one transcript and completed member checking with a key informant. I asked the debriefer to code the transcript independently, and then we compared our codes and talked through the similarities and differences in our analysis. This process confirmed the codes I derived from the interview data and helped tease out some of the codes that did not align with the a priori codes. Through dialogue with the peer debriefer, I was able to clarify language describing these codes. Additionally, I asked one participant to review a draft of chapter four to ensure my representation of the change process was accurate from that participant's perspective. Again, this process confirmed that my representation was accurate and also prompted the participant to share additional insights not shared during our interview. For example, the informant recalled an important structure at CU that she had not shared during our interview. She indicated that staff are classified as faculty at CU and that this was an important feature of their culture that facilitated relationships between faculty and student affairs staff and helped the latter see themselves as part of the learning enterprise. This additional information allowed me to enhance my representation of the change process.

I compared interview data across interviews and across the groups (student affairs assessment leader, divisional leadership, unit staff) as well as collected information for document analysis and onsite observations. Taking a constructivist approach was helpful here again as the initial groups I considered, by organizational level, were not the only groupings relevant to my analysis. For example, I also noticed similarities and differences among those that were part of the Assessment Council for longer periods of time compared with those that were newer to the group.

Documents. To analyze the documents, I first saved them electronically in a file and then created an excel document to organize them by year which supported the chronological sequencing analysis (Yin, 2014). Next, as I read each document, I noted the author and purpose of the document - whether it supported the transmission of culture, promoted learning and social cognition, or both. As I conducted analysis of the interview data, I referenced the documents to enhance my understanding, confirm, or question my codes and insights. The documents reviewed covered a wide variety of topics about the division's assessment efforts including the timeline of assessment efforts during the change process, reports, newsletters, handbooks, and divisional statements about how the division works and their priorities. The document analysis served to triangulate data collected from the interviews, substantiate the timeline of the major milestones in the change process, and elaborate on my understanding of some of the key milestones.

Role of the Researcher

It is important for researchers to discuss their relationship to the topic being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case, I hold the same role as the main participants; I have been a student affairs assessment leader for the past eight years at a four-year, private university. This means that I have a significant knowledge base in the field of assessment, especially as it relates to the student affairs context. This experience has formed a practitioner-based hypothesis that I have implemented in my own practice to some extent, about how to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in student affairs. Using Banks' (2006) typology of crosscultural researchers, I would be considered an indigenous insider - one who holds similar knowledge, values, and beliefs to the

community being studied. To mitigate these potential biases, I asked follow up questions during the interviews to ensure I did not impose my understanding of language choice that may be common in the field and to allow participants to clearly convey the meaning they personally attached to their comments. I conducted member checking with a key informant to ensure accuracy of my interpretations after transcription and initial analysis. I also utilized peer debriefing to address any concerns regarding my positionality and help to ensure that I did not unduly influence data collection or analysis, recognizing that the researcher is always an instrument in the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of the study including a brief description of research already completed to establish a definition for a culture of assessment in student affairs, outlined the design of the study, described the methods used to collect and analyze the data, and discussed my positionality with the topic being studied. In chapters four and five, I will share the key findings from this study.

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS:

THE ROOTS OF A CULTURE

Introduction

The study of change in higher education is akin to the study of reform in the K-12 setting where Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) applied the Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System framework to examine school reform and the scaling up process. They found that not only elements of structure, culture, and agency influence the reform process but that structure, culture, and agency are co-constructed and together influence one another the reform process, see Figure 1. This interaction is important to understanding the change process both in the K-12 setting as well as the higher education setting.

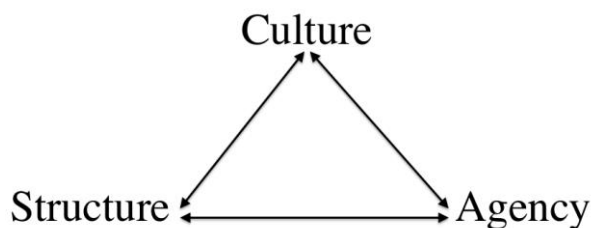


Figure 1. Culture, structure, and agency as a mediational system (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002).

In this study, structure refers to the various policies and practices, positions, reporting lines, and groups related to assessment in a student affairs division. Culture refers to a set of shared meanings, values, and beliefs; the history and traditions associated with the various levels of culture – institutional, divisional, other subcultures. Agency refers to actions individuals take, at any level, to influence the change process. Each of these components, structure, culture, and agency, influenced the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs in this

study. And more importantly, the interaction and co-construction among these components as well as influences beyond structure, culture, and agency stimulated the change process. This study of the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs is informed by the work of Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) in that I am using their Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediation System as a theoretical framework to understand the change process. Because this study takes place in the higher education setting, I also used Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought on organizational change in higher education to ensure the distinctive features of the higher education setting are also addressed.

The setting for this study is Change University (CU), a public, land grant university serving approximately 32,000 primarily undergraduate students. CU is classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as a doctoral university with the highest research activity and selective admission. CU is fully accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and was most recently reaffirmed in 2011. The division of student affairs at Change University has been engaged in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in their division for the past 22 years. Table 2 lists the 11 participants in the study and some descriptive information about their positions and tenure in their roles and at CU.

Chronological sequencing served as one of the analytical lenses for this case study (Yin, 2014) and data was collected with an interest in participants' perceptions of the major milestones in the change process. Figure 5 depicts these milestones in a timeline covering the period that bounds the study, 1994-2017. The milestones shared by

participants were verified via documents available on CU's website and cross-referencing between participants.

In this and the following chapter, I portray the evolution of the change process in Change University's division of student affairs while examining each of the factors associated with the change process: structure, culture, agency, and their reflexive nature, as well as how external influences impact the change process.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Level	Years at CU	Years on SAAC
Ray	VPSA ^a	22	Not a member of SAAC
Annie	VPSA ^b	9	Not a member of SAAC
Samantha	SAAL ^c	19	11
Thomas	SAAL ^d	4	4
John	Unit Staff ^e	22	21
William	Unit Staff ^e	22	16
Sarah	Unit Staff	25	11
Ava	Unit Staff	22	13
Claire	Unit Staff	7	5
Grace	SAAL & Unit Staff	6	6
Emma	Unit Staff	5	5

Note. Change University (CU); Student Affairs Assessment Council (SAAC); (VPSA) the person holding a leadership role in the division of student affairs, in this study, both participants are the Chief Student Affairs Officer; Student Affairs Assessment Leader (SAAL) – the person holding a leadership role in coordinating assessment for the division of student affairs.

^a Vice Provost for Student Affairs, (1995-2014)

^b Vice Provost for Student Affairs (2014-2017)

^c Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation/Planning (2002-2013)

^d Director, Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning (2013-present)

^e Founding member of the Student Affairs Assessment Committee

1994	Samantha arrives at CU in a different role in Student Affairs
1995	Ray arrives at CU as Vice Provost for Student Affairs
1996	Our Campus Compact developed; Student Affairs Assessment Committee formed
1997	
1998	Assessment Committee proposes Director of Assessment position
1999	
2000	Assessment Committee proposes Director of Assessment position
2001	
2002	Office of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation (SARE) established; Student Affairs Assessment Committee becomes the Student Affairs Assessment Council (SAAC) with new charge; Assessment course included in student affairs graduate preparation program
2003	Student Affairs assessment language established; new President arrives at CU
2004	
2005	SAAC begins review of assessment plans/reports; SAAC retreats begin; Student Affairs establishes division-wide learning outcomes; new Provost arrives at CU
2006	
2007	
2008	Implement Student Voice including assessment plans module; Graduate Assistant (GA) position added to SARE office; Annie arrives at CU in a role in academic affairs
2009	
2010	Two GA positions added to SARE office
2011	Grace arrives at CU as new coordinator in SARE office; implemented Compliance Assist for assessment plans; divisional planning is added to the SARE portfolio – name changed to Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning (SAREP); Student Affairs receives a commendation for assessment efforts from regional accreditor; divisional strategic plan developed
2012	
2013	Samantha retires as Director of SAREP; Thomas arrives as new Director of SAREP; built swipe system with ID center to track participation
2014	Ray retires as Vice Provost for Student Affairs; enrollment management no longer reports to Student Affairs; Annie started as Vice Provost for Student Affairs
2015	Second full-time coordinator position added to SAREP office; Vice Provost for Student Affairs tied discretionary funding to assessment plans
2016	New Student Affairs divisional strategic plan developed; initiated Student Affairs Education Forums (SAEF)
2017	Provost leaves CU for presidency at another institution; new Provost arrives at CU; Thomas' title changed to Assistant Vice Provost/Director of SAREP; Annie leaves CU for a position at another institution

Figure 5. Change University timeline of key milestones in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs (1994-2017).

Institutional and Divisional Culture

A culture of assessment does not just materialize, it is rooted in what Schein (2010, pp. 1-2) referred to as categories of culture: *macrocultures* (e.g., higher education as a system), *organizational cultures* (e.g., Change University as an institutional culture), *subcultures* (e.g., Change University division of student affairs as a divisional culture), and *microcultures* (e.g., Change University's Student Affairs Assessment Council). The culture of assessment in student affairs, a subculture, is shaped by the essence of the related macro and organizational cultures. And it is important to begin a discussion of the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs by understanding the macro and organizational structures involved in this study. This section focuses on how the institutional and divisional cultures provided a container for the student affairs assessment culture to take root (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Institutional Culture

At the institutional level, CU's classification as a doctoral university with the highest research activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.) influences the culture of assessment in student affairs in several ways. First, when Ray was hired as the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) at CU, his position included a tenured faculty appointment in the one of the colleges and teaching and responsibilities in the student affairs graduate preparation program. While student affairs can often be considered external to the learning enterprise, Ray's role included clear connections to it. Annie, Ray's successor, was hired from the academic affairs division at CU where she previously played a significant role in the university's most recent reaffirmation of accreditation. Additionally, CU classifies student affairs staff positions as faculty which

involves representation on the faculty senate and faculty committees, promotes authentic relationships with faculty at levels beyond the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) level, and facilitates their role as faculty in the higher education preparation program on campus. Further, Samantha shared that she worked with many faculty regarding assessment, presented to various faculty committees and departments about assessment, and that faculty viewed her as a resource and partner.

Second, the reporting line for the CSAO, a structure, is to the provost rather than the president. So Ray and Annie's title as CSAO is Vice Provost for Student Affairs (VPSA). Among U.S. colleges and universities, 16% of chief student affairs officers report to the provost or chief academic officer while 72% report to the president (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2014). This less common reporting structure was embraced by both Ray and Annie. They each discussed the importance of the reporting relationship structure because it provided a regular, built-in means for interaction between leaders in academic affairs and student affairs and fostered shared responsibility for the learning enterprise. Thomas commented on the importance of these various features of the institutional culture:

Ray had tenure, so that made it so that he could get away with some stuff... I think that's [his title as vice provost for student affairs] an important thing too. There's Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. I'm an assistant vice *provost*, which keeps that academic sort of footing, right? Annie's the vice *provost*, I think that says something. They haven't changed it to president, and I don't know if they will. It means that, when we talk about the term 'student affairs educator,' we talk about things like learning design. We talk about measuring learning and stuff like that. A lot of us in Student Affairs, do teach in the classroom as well. These divisions are a little bit different here than I've seen. Another example would be, faculty senate. I'm a faculty senator and I can vote and I'm in Student Affairs. That's really different. We have two representatives at any time in Faculty Senate. We can be on curriculum committees. We can't be on tenure promotion type stuff, but we can be on curriculum committee? We can redesign the core? Where? I've never been at a place where we can do that before...

These divisions and that sort of thing, the borders are really murky on purpose. I think ultimately, the students unite the work.

Third, the research identity of CU made it important to frame the student affairs division approach to assessment as a scholarly activity. At the time that assessment efforts began in student affairs at CU, the assessment literature was limited and technology more primitive than it is today. One founding Assessment Committee members shared that seeking assessment and research methods involved going to the library and using physical catalogs to find current literature on assessment and research methods that they could apply to their work in student affairs. Samantha and Ray also talked about interviewing other institutions, connecting to conferences on assessment, and contributing to the limited scholarship in the field as their means for learning about assessment practices. Regarding the materials the Assessment Committee generated, Ray explained that they wanted to "figure out how to just not write those as reports but to also create those [assessment reports] as scholarly documents." Ray and Samantha worked with the institution to develop a digital archive, an institutional digital repository that captures the scholarly work of the campus including published articles, dissertations, and reports to both share and preserve that information. Table 3 lists the student affairs assessment documents catalogued on the digital archive. Ray also mentioned that the name of the assessment office, once it was funded, was intentionally chosen and aligned with the institutional identity as a research university. They chose the name Student Affairs Research and Evaluation rather than just *assessment* because they felt that *research and evaluation* captured more clearly what they were trying to do and anchored their work as scholarly activity. This is another way that student affairs tight relationship with academic affairs was represented.

Fourth, their research identity also provided a clear common purpose for staff that nurtured the ground for assessment to take root in student affairs. John shared, "Yeah, we're a research institution, so there is a general campus wide feeling that we're out there to make change. We're out there to make a difference. I think that culture helped grow assessment here."

Table 3

CU Student Affairs Assessment Documents Available on Institutional Digital Archive.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Document</u>
2002-03	Change University 2003 Pilot Faculty Survey of Student Engagement Report; Change University 2002 Freshman Survey Results: Cooperative Institutional Research Program; <i>CU Perspective Vol 1</i>
2003-04	Change University 2003 Your First College Year Survey Results; Change University 2003 Freshman Survey Results: Cooperative Institutional Research Program; <i>CU Perspective Vol 2</i>
2004-05	CU 2005 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement Report; Change University 2004 Freshman Survey Results: Cooperative Institutional Research Program; <i>CU Perspective Vol 3</i>
2005-06	The New SAAC Member Introductory Information ; Change University Cooperative Institutional Research Program 2005 Freshman Survey Results; Invitation for Assessment Conversations and Consultation ; <i>CU Perspective Vol 4</i>
2006-07	Student Affairs Survey Results Presentation, Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership: Change University Results; <i>Tuesdays with Assessment Fall Workshop Schedule</i>
2007-08	Entering Student Survey, 2007 Change University Results; <i>CU Perspective Vol 5</i>
2008-09	Diversity, Multiculturalism, and Inclusivity Survey: CU Results, June 2009; <i>CU Perspective Vol 6</i>
2009-10	Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) 2009 CU Results (Student Affairs Research Report, 01-10); <i>CU Perspective Vol 7</i>
2010-11	<i>Glossary of Terms & Benny's Story</i> ; <i>2011-12 AC Planning</i> , Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) 2010 CU Results (Student Affairs Research Report, 02-11); Strategic Plan Launch - Pursuing a Possibility Rich Future, Strategic Planning Phase Formats ; <i>CU Perspective Vol 8</i>
2011-12	<i>Metric Relationship Model</i> ; Change University Cooperative Institutional Research Program 2011 Freshman Survey Results (Student Affairs Research Report 01-12); <i>CU Perspective Vol 9</i>
2012-13	Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) 2012 CU Results (Student Affairs Research Report, 02-12); High Achiever Report (BSSE); <i>CU Perspective Vol 10</i>
Unknown	Well Oriented SAAC Member; Use of Assessment Software for the Division of Student Affairs ; <i>Consistent Data Collection for Units to Report Annually in the Division of Student Affairs</i> ; <i>Proposed Learning Outcome Process</i> ; Assessment Plan Report Review Meeting Agenda ; <i>Change University Division of Student Affairs Assessment Handbook</i>

Note. **bold** indicates documents that support transmission of culture; *italics* indicates documents that promote learning and social cognition; bold and italics indicates documents that both support culture transmission and promote learning and social cognition. Standard formatting reflects scholarly report.

Another key element of CU's institutional culture is their central focus on students. Several participants described how a student centered ethos emanates from the executive leadership down through the entire organization in student affairs. Thomas shared instances of the president's response to campus issues where the president walked with students during protests, held town hall meetings with students to listen to their concerns, and regularly spoke directly with students who expressed concerns so that he and his team could take action to resolve issues. Thomas recalled an example:

...there was a speak out on campus, where students of color spoke out about what it means to be in a very predominately white institution, like Change University. From that, town halls started, where the president and the dean of students and the chief diversity officer will just open up to the entire campus, these town halls. Who does that?

Participants who worked at other colleges or universities prior to CU characterize this example set by executive leadership and the student-centered culture at the institution as more active and profound than what they observed at other institutions. A clear, consistent emphasis on students seems to be a value and form of agency that prepared the ground for assessment to take root at CU. This cultural element that motivates student-centered action implies that a structure that occurs on other campuses is perceived to be missing here – hierarchy that makes executive leadership invisible to students. On many large campuses, the hierarchical structure and reporting lines often make the president and executive leadership inaccessible to students. Yet, here, on this large campus, the president and his executive team engage with students frequently. This structural element, hierarchy, is not present at CU and its absence is important to notice. Of the three components of the change model, structure is the easiest to identify and it may be just as important to understand the absence of structure as it is to identify the presence of it.

Messages from executive leadership mattered to the participants in this study, several discussed feeling that assessment was supported by the president and his cabinet and that this helped leverage the change process in student affairs. However, several also noted that the culture of assessment in academic affairs was not the same as that in student affairs. So, while messages from executive leadership have an influence in some subcultures (e.g., student affairs), those same messages may not resonate with other subcultures (e.g., academic affairs). This implies that the messages from the top leadership (i.e., agency) may have varying impact in fostering change, depending on the subcultures receiving the message.

Stability of leadership also seemed to impact change. Thomas discussed the importance of stable leadership. He explained that the stable tenure of key leaders at the institution resulted in an 11-year period where the president, provost, and vice provost for student affairs were consistent. This scenario is unusual in higher education where the average tenure of college presidents at public colleges is six years (American Council on Education and TIAA Institute, 2017) and typically, transition occurs at the provost level when a new president arrives resulting in more tumultuous than stable leadership. This sustained relationship among these three leaders created a condition for trust to be fostered, another key ingredient for assessment to take root.

Divisional Culture

The institutional culture influenced the student affairs divisional culture and regarding at least one dimension – student centeredness – the institutional and divisional cultures were consistent. Several participants, especially those that have worked at other institutions prior to working at CU, described the divisional culture of student

centeredness as one of genuine care and love for students. Thomas shared, “It's unlike any Student Affairs culture I've experienced. We need to put students first and this is why we're doing that work.” At the time CU’s division of student affairs began to engage in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs, the institution was operating in a low resource environment characterized by budget cuts and layoffs; this kind of environment affects staff morale. When Ray assumed the vice provost for student affairs role in 1995, he recognized these two important elements of the divisional culture and applied a leadership style and approach that matched the culture. Morgan (2006) described this as “reading” the situation, applying multiple lenses to understand the complexities therein, and identifying an approach that matches the reading of the situation.

Ray made a foundational decision as he began as the Vice Provost for Student Affairs in the 1995-96 academic year, he engaged the division in the development of Our Campus Compact, a statement of the vision, values, and commitments of the division. The document outlined not only the vision or aspirational direction for where the division was heading but also “a broad set of rights and responsibilities that provide the foundation for positive relationships, standards of professionalism, learning objectives, and personal accountability within our organization.”

Our Campus Compact

Our Campus Compact was a critical influence on the change process involved in developing and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division because of its sequence at the beginning of the change process, how it was created (agency), and it reflected the structure-culture-agency framework in several ways. First, the Compact was a written

document, a structure, which reflected the values of the division and how they wanted to work with one another and what others could expect when working with them. This structure was a form of communication and shared understanding among members of the division and their constituents as well as a promise to students. This tangible structure was an important touch point that resonated with members of the division today. Second, the content of Our Campus Compact represented their set of shared values, a transmission of the group's culture and how they agreed it would be going forward. The language chosen for the title was an important cultural element. Using the word 'our' along with the intentional way the document was developed reinforces that this was a Compact owned by all members of the division rather than just Ray and/or his direct reports. Naming the document Our Campus Compact rather than a strategic plan or mission and values reinforced the concept of an agreement, which required active participation on all parts of the organization to uphold. A plan, mission, and values statement can be passive, a compact was more active. Third, Ray's decision to create a campus compact and how he went about creating it reflected his leadership style and agency in accompanying the division along a specific path. One participant described Ray as a visionary and Ray's self-described philosophy is to follow the energy and empower others. Ray's agency is reflected in the fact that he involved the entire division in the development of the Compact rather than writing a document independently and imposing it on the division; this approach fostered trust. Acknowledging the low-resource environment of the institution at the time, Ray read the situation in a complex manner and matched his leadership approach to fit the context (Morgan, 2006):

...this is a philosophical thing, my view of leadership. For me, it's easier to support energy than to manage consequences. I believe that when you put people

in a position where you say you have to, everybody must, then you have to have consequences for people who don't. When you're in a low resource environment like we were, we didn't have human resources or otherwise that we could allocate to managing consequences. It was so much easier to support energy than to be trying to figure out where people weren't doing things and we asked the group ultimately to identify where they thought we ought to go and what approaches we should use to do that.

Several participants described how the non-hierarchical, empowering tone set by Ray's agency from the beginning established a strong foundation for change to occur. In this one milestone, Our Campus Compact, each of the components of the structure-culture-agency model are reflected and their interaction is seen as important to the change process. The final Campus Compact document was a *structure*. Ray demonstrated a specific form of *agency* in his choices about how to create the Compact. The contents of the Compact, a reflection of the group's shared values, represents *culture*. This one example encompasses each of the factors, structure, culture, and agency, and illustrates their co-constructed nature in influencing the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division.

While structures are the easiest component of the change model for participants to identify, only a few mentioned the Compact specifically, Ray, Samantha, and Thomas.

As a relative newcomer to the division, Thomas shared:

but it is just a document. How we actually live it and act on it and that sort of thing, I think that's where I've seen a lot of folks in student affairs that are very dedicated to those values.

This points to the reflexive relationships among the structure-culture-agency components in that the document may have been a critical structure for a certain period of time after it was created and then perhaps evolved to *become* culture. Where the document is no longer needed as a specific reference, the values and ways of being with one another have become 'the way things are done around here,' the manifestation of culture. The physical

document, a structure, may no longer be as important in the cultural transmission process to new members. Sharing values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions now occurs through other means of transmitting culture.

Our Campus Compact is infused in the culture through the initiatives identified by the division as the priorities that would help them live out the stated values in the document. One of the initiatives identified through the Campus Compact process was “focused, on-going assessment - to implement a comprehensive, on-going assessment program to measure student and staff perception, assess needs, and establish baselines for staff performance and Student Affairs service”. Establishing assessment as a priority through the Our Campus Compact process is important for several reasons. First, the initiative was identified as an agreement from the division, a grassroots origination rather than a top down one. This reflects a type of agency that matched the divisional and institutional culture and helps to partially explain why it helped the assessment culture take root in that specific context. At other institutions with different institutional or divisional cultures, a different approach such as top down may be more productive.

Grace observed:

Yeah. I think. At least for the culture of CU, I think that having the early days be kind of like a grassroots thing. That probably wouldn't work at every place, but I think that really helped develop buy-in across the division, where some other places more top-down or policy-driven approaches may have been better.

In this case, a leader’s ability to match the leadership approach to the culture was critical in fostering change rather than resistance. This requires the ability of the leader to read the culture from multiple lenses to gain a complex understanding of the culture and situation (Morgan, 2006).

Second, the structure for implementing the assessment initiative was invitational, open to anyone interested in participating and was non-hierarchical – people with a range of titles were part of the group and agency within the group did not depend on title. For example, a coordinator could lead a group of unit heads and other unit staff who may have higher status in the organization. Leadership rotated and everyone was encouraged to have equal voice regardless of title. Ray's agency set the tone for this anti-hierarchical approach to work, he led by example, encouraged equal voice, permeable boundaries, and vulnerability. The initial structure that worked to implement the assessment initiative was the Assessment Committee, a group charged by Ray. Talking with people 21 years later, the formation of this group and the agency involved is an important part of their history and participants attribute the depth of their culture to this formation. Grace shared:

I think that one of the really cool things about our office is that one, there was an assessment committee for a while that actually proposed the formation of our unit. I think they had to do it three times before it actually happened. To me, that kind of speaks to the kind of commitment that people in our division have or had at the time to wanting to know how or what students are learning through the work that they do.

History is an element that can play an important role in transmitting culture, the stories told about how things happened in the past influence how a new member of the community frames their work and interprets other information they receive about the culture.

The interaction between structure, culture, and agency in the formation of Our Campus Compact shows up in Ray's agency regarding the way he went about creating the actual compact, a structure that reflected and shaped culture. The compact then evolved from a structure *to* the culture. This interaction of structure, culture, and agency

laid the groundwork for the Assessment Committee to become the Assessment Council, a structure that has persisted throughout the change process in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division.

From the Assessment Committee to the Assessment Council

The Assessment Committee was formed as an initiative group stemming from the Our Campus Compact process in 1996. The Committee met regularly for six years and during that time promoted assessment education within the student affairs units, created best practices documents, brought in assessment experts, and participated in conferences to further their learning around assessment. These are examples of tangible structures that supported the change process. After the first two years, the Committee proposed the creation of a Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation position (a new structure) to lead the Committee and coordinate assessment efforts for the division. This and a second proposal two years later were not funded at the time. However, a third proposal from the Committee was funded and Samantha was hired as the first Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation in 2002. This new position and the accompanying resources were structures that were important for two reasons. First, the recommendation to establish a position is a form of agency that came from the Committee (grassroots) rather than Ray (top down). This grassroots approach matched the culture of the division and had it come from the top down, it may not have had the same effect. Second, Ray used agency in his position to allocate limited resources, a structure, to create a structure, a central position that reported to him for assessment. This communicated an affirmative message about the importance of assessment to the division's work as a value of the culture. Ray's authenticity in promoting empowerment

and following the energy of the group was realized when he accepted the Committee's proposal to create this new position and built trust.

With the new position, Ray established a new charge for the group and the Assessment Committee became the Assessment Council and, in her new role, Samantha chaired the Council. Building on the Assessment Committee's work, the Assessment Council produced structures such as regular meetings, annual retreats, the practice of reviewing unit assessment plans and reports and providing feedback to one another. These are all important structures that participants were able to name even after a significant time that had passed since they were created. Some of these structures have changed or been discontinued but they create a tangible storyline for transmitting the culture to newcomers and outsiders. In her role as the Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation, Samantha maintained a timeline on the student affairs assessment website and shared the documents and records created by the Assessment Council both on the website and the institutional digital archive, see Table 2. These structures were manifestations of the values established by Our Campus Compact and the Assessment Council, and they helped to bring the values of the group to life and establish a culture that valued assessment. The central value of both the Assessment Committee and the Council was that it was a learning community. Samantha described how she and the Council defined a learning community:

They came up with an assessment council and those folks began to sort of organize a community learning group. You could go there and know nothing and people would help you learn or you could go there and be a whiz bang and people would still help you learn. There was the expectation and this carried throughout.

The importance of learning and learning community to the Assessment Council's work and the change process in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the

division is evidenced by the fact that the word ‘learning’ or its variations was mentioned 338 times across the 11 participant transcripts. The next section discusses the importance of learning in the change process at CU.

Learning and Ego Risks

"The core principle or the foundational value that underlies all of our efforts was the fact that we needed to learn in order to be able to do, in order to be who we wanted to be." - Ray

Learning was a central value in Our Campus Compact and was particularly salient to one of the specific initiatives, “establishing focused and ongoing assessment”, and the related approach taken to achieve it. Ray recognized from the beginning that the practice of assessment involves ego risks and the approach needed to be intentional.

I think that's really important in leadership broadly but I also think particularly in terms of doing something again, that can have ego risks or identity threat associated with it, like assessment work does. That you've got to bring care so people know that you're on their side and that this isn't about a gotcha exercise. This is about we, us trying to demonstrate value or identify ways that we can measure the value or our potential to bring value. How do you create a culture where eventually you have to make a decision about - is something being done there of value and the way that you approach it isn't about looking for what's not right.

Ray’s sensitivity to what can often be characterized as “assessment baggage” or reasons for resistance, and his ability to frame it as an ego risk or identity threat shows a sophistication in his leadership and agency. Framing (Kahneman, 2011) is a key strategy for leaders engaging in the change process, when it can be done in the context of reading the situation and culture, it can foster the learning process. Learning was an important frame and identity for the Assessment Council as they engaged in the change process. This section will discuss the influence of one’s personal values in the change process, some of the key learning shifts and milestones that participants identified through the

change process, and demonstrate how learning represents the reflexivity of structure, culture, and agency in the change process.

Change Does Not Start from Scratch

Several participants discussed holding a personal value that supported assessment and learning that stemmed from such experiences as the way they were brought up as a child, a bachelors or master's degree program, or a previous professional experience in another field. For example, John discussed values instilled from his father regarding weighing costs and benefits and his background in the business world before coming to higher education. When the Assessment Committee was formed, this personal interest prompted his decision to join that group. Another example was Samantha's professional background in counseling psychology and student affairs administration. She served in another role at CU and also worked at other institutions in a variety of roles before stepping into the role of Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation. This professional lens shaped her interest in assessment and learning. We all come to our work with a variety of personal and professional lenses and the combination of the lenses brought to this group mattered in their approach to change.

Ray's leadership style is relational, empowering, and creates a safe place for failure and learning which establishes a healthy container (Heifitz & Linksky, 2017) for the assessment culture to take root. Samantha's training prepared her in important ways to be the inaugural student affairs assessment leader at CU for 11 years and was a good match to the conditions Ray's agency created. Samantha's educational and professional background included learning, human development, and counseling theory and practice. Samantha worked in several of the student affairs units she was now supporting so she

had a good understanding of the issues and specific work of those units. Samantha shared that she also had a background in teaching at the college and high school level, which informed her approach to “bring people along on a learning journey.” The combination of (1) Ray’s ability to foster an environment where relationships and people are valued, mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn, and leadership and power are shared; (2) the division’s willingness to engage in Our Campus Compact and what it stood for; and (3) Samantha’s approach to engaging the Assessment Council from a learning and group development standpoint were important aspects in support of the change and demonstrate the power of individual agency in the change process. Both Ray and Samantha set the tone by leading by example and being emotionally vulnerable with others, which invited members of the division into a safe learning community. John, a founding member of the Assessment Committee, exemplifies this in one of his observations about the forming of the Assessment Council, “Since it was an organic formation, there was no hierarchy, or basically, we could ask dumb things and everybody was accepting of that.” He goes on to share his reflections about how the struggles and failures they experienced were received by the leadership:

Well, I think that’s one of the other things that Samantha always taught is she didn’t want to see us necessarily show success all the time. She and Ray wanted to see failures and how we grew from those failures. I think that was helpful in making sure the data was presented honestly.

There was strong alignment between the ways that Ray and Samantha talked about their intentions with their agency and the way members of the Assessment Council received it. Throughout my analysis there were several occasions where one of the leaders (Ray, Annie, Samantha, or Thomas) shared something about their intentions, their style, their approach and then I found evidence that their message was received as intended by a

member of the Assessment Council through statements in their interviews. For example, both Ray and Samantha endorsed a non-hierarchical approach to the Assessment Council and Samantha discussed creating an environment where people came to learn. And John reflected, “since it was an organic formation, there was no hierarchy, or basically, we could ask dumb things and everybody was accepting of that.” This pattern of clear messaging and that it was received as intended by leaders means that messaging is a powerful tool in fostering the change process.

Recognizing that individuals are not starting from a blank slate but rather bringing their own personal values, beliefs, professional experiences, and frames to the change process helps leaders evaluate the baseline starting point. At CU, the leaders and founding members of the Assessment Committee started with personal values that aligned with assessment, the focus of the change. In other situations, this may not be the case and a leader may need to take a different approach and begin with cultivating values and openness to the topic of the focus of the change. Understanding the baseline from where the change begins helps leaders understand the underlying assumptions and then where learning may need to focus. Ray recognized the starting point and shared his strategy:

We invested significantly in sending people out in teams because we believed that learning in isolation would not have the kind of systemic impact that sending out individuals to come back and try to convince people, but to send out people in groups who learn and then come back with the ability to co-create possibilities was a really important dimension of our work.

As the division approached the task of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment, they approached it from a learning perspective. As groups went out to learn about assessment and how to implement it at CU, they encountered some challenges that involved changing the way they think about and approach their work in the division. As

such, Samantha needed to employ some different strategies to navigate this. The next section discusses some of the key learning shifts and learning milestones involved in the CU change process.

Learning Shift Milestones

Through this learning process, the Assessment Council and members of the division needed to make shifts in their current espoused beliefs, values and underlying assumptions (Shein, 2010). In addition to the core identity as a learning community, the Assessment Council embraced the values established by the Compact: (1) anti-hierarchical – formal roles did not matter, anyone can lead in the group; (2) permeable boundaries – anyone can join at any time regardless of training; and (3) commitment to the initiative – fostering an assessment culture in the division. In doing so, the Assessment Council extended the stated values or espoused theories of the newly adopted Compact (Argyris & Schön, 1996) and translated them into theories-in-use which nurtured the culture and helped it take form. This process of more closely aligning espoused theories with theories-in-use is a form of learning. As a learning community, the group took seriously the desire to advance their learning about assessment practices and how to use assessment to make a difference with students. Several relevant points of learning and related conditions shaped the change process: the language they used regarding assessment practice, the extent to which members of the division viewed themselves as educators, their vulnerability to share their “early learning,” establishing a position to coordinate assessment efforts for the division, and embracing learning as an enduring process.

Language. One of the first things Samantha identified when she became Chair of the Council was that the language the group was using around assessment was variable and not consistent. For example, terms like goal, objective, and outcome held different meanings for different members of the Council. She recognized that if the goal was to create a culture of assessment, a common language was essential. Language is an artifact of the culture (Schein, 2010) and in the process of talking through and coming to agreement about a set of terms, an assessment language for the division, the Council learned. This learning was a form of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) in that the process of agreeing on language about their assessment practice required clear articulation of how they each understood a term differently, determining the best language for their context, and giving up one's previous understanding for a new one. The learning they produced was captured in a document, a structure that then grew to become a full handbook, see Table 3. This process of moving from a cultural element, language, to a formalized structure, a document adopted by the division is another example of the reflexivity of the structure, culture, and agentive factors. And in this case, learning was a key part of the interaction. To move from acknowledging that language is an important element of culture to developing a formalized, commonly adopted language in the form of a handbook, a structure, required learning, the process that captures the reflexive relationship between structure and culture in this case. Further, as their language and understanding evolved through learning, the SAREP office revised their language and posted an updated document, a structure, on their website.

Educator identity. Once a common language was established, Samantha described one of the first learning shifts as related to how they wanted to use assessment

to make a difference for students. Early in their processes, the Assessment Council focused on counting and satisfaction surveys as their assessment strategies, where many student affairs divisions start with assessment. Samantha observed that many student affairs staff did not view themselves as educators:

The hard part was shifting that [student affairs' staff identity as a service provider rather than educator] and deciding to shift it to learning because many, many, many people in Student Affairs have absolutely no learning theory background or education or even an education major, and so it was like, Well, what do you mean, learning?

Samantha was referring to the disconnect many student affairs staff experienced when they were first asked to view themselves as educators who are responsible for student learning outside the classroom. Viewing oneself as more of a service provider than an educator was a common self-perception of student affairs professionals at the time, it was an underlying assumption that the purpose of their role was to serve students but not necessarily facilitate their learning and development outside the classroom (Keeling, 2004). This was not unique to CU as it was not until a few pivotal reports and books³ influenced the student affairs field to emphasize the educator identity within the student affairs practitioner role. These documents shaped graduate preparation programs, conference topics, and student affairs assessment practice, which in turn led to a national shift in the self-perception of student affairs practitioners. In trying to make this shift, Samantha was dealing with an underlying assumption that student affairs professionals support students and are not educators but she recognized the development in the external

³ *The Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1996), *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Affairs Professionals, 1997), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, & National Association of Student Affairs Professionals, 1998), and *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004).

environment and wanted to shift that underlying assumption at CU. She was experiencing a mismatch between a desire to move from just counting and satisfaction as assessment strategies to a more sophisticated kind of assessment – assessing student learning outside the classroom. To make this shift, she also needed to address the underlying assumption held by many student affairs professionals that they are not educators.

Sharing our early learning. Underlying assumptions are powerful because they are tacit. Scholars suggested that social cognition theories can inform leaders' action to address underlying assumptions (Kezar, 2014; Weick, 1995). These theories focus on learning as a means for calling attention to the tacit and working with it out in the open so that it can be adjusted and reinterpreted in a different way before it goes back to implicitly informing our actions. Samantha and Ray's form of agency set the stage for what unfolded to be possible. Samantha cultivated and prepared the Council to take a risky step professionally involving ego risk and identity threat. As a group, the Council decided that they would share their assessment plans and reports with one another and provide feedback to one another for the purpose of advancing their learning. Samantha recalled:

We had agreed that this was risky to share this kind of thing with your colleagues and peers because we were all type A and are used to being perfect, and good, and wonderful, and now we were going to show our early learning. It wasn't our best to each other and that's how it started, and once I did it then I said, "Okay. Who's next?" Somebody else said, "I'll go next." It was a slow start and we just began.

Samantha's willingness to be vulnerable and role model this practice that involved ego risk and identity threat fostered trust among the group and allowed them to take a step in addressing this underlying assumption about their roles as student affairs professionals.

She went on to say:

Because up until then it had been all talk nobody had to show anything to anybody. It was really, "Can I trust you to take care of me even when I show you my vulnerable self?" Because when you're learning something new you're not going to get it right and it's going to be kind of messy, and that really fostered trust and openness about being able to give feedback, even critical, and still be colleagues, and work together, and laugh because we all know we made that same mistake.

Samantha's term, 'early learning' is an elegant expression of both the fact that learning was critical to the change process and also that learning is a process that involves developing trust among the group. 'Our early learning' implies that learning happened together, it started as an immature baseline, and then developed to a much more sophisticated level that mirrored and catalyzed the change process.

Another example of Ray's vulnerable and authentic agency also supported this practice of reviewing one another's assessment reports and plans. Ray's office, the Vice Provost for Student Affairs, participated in the review of assessment plans and reports. He role modeled the learning process he and Samantha wanted others to engage in to foster the change process. He received agency from a member of the Assessment Council who provided feedback on his own assessment report. Ray's form of agency influenced how members of the division received messages about the value of assessment and its importance among the competing priorities present in their work. If the VPSA could make time to create an assessment report and receive feedback from a Council member, then others could do it too.

The practice of reviewing the plans/reports was a key milestone in the learning that propelled the Council forward in terms of sophistication in their assessment practice and the change process. Reviewing one another's plans and reports promoted trust and vulnerability, which are key conditions for learning. The practice also helped them recognize the steps they had taken and what the next steps should be. Ava shared that

“some of the learning outcome things came from our reviews of the different plans because we could see that everybody was just doing counting.” This recognition helped the Council to see that they could do more and engage in learning outcomes, a more sophisticated practice than counting and satisfaction. The culture that was being formed elevated the group’s agency in taking advantage of the opportunity to evolve their assessment practice.

The risk of a position. Ray and Samantha were aware of the risk that creating a position, a Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation, could involve – siloing assessment efforts in one unit. They were clear that the position and the Assessment Council were intended to build a culture that would last beyond one person, to institutionalize the efforts rather than exist beyond a “band of volunteers,” Samantha’s loving characterization of the Assessment Council. Ray talked about the importance of the culture existing beyond the SAAL and wanting to “build that and empower that because you want the value to exist in the culture, not in an individual. So that even when you change leaders, you’ve got this group.” The Council’s committed identity as a learning community seemed to mitigate the risk of the work being isolated to the Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation. Council members were dedicated to this work as evidenced by the tenure of the participants in this study (see Table 2) and learning was something that fueled their commitment. Ava shared “every plan here is doing learning outcomes finally but they’re all through surveys. Just kind of looking at them, how can we advance what we’re doing. So the next step we would say, would be X ... and spend some time looking at that as a group.” It was clear that a commitment to assessment and learning to advance their work existed within the group, a marker of a

learning community. Had this not been the case, implementing a position and office may have interfered with the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs.

Learning is a process. It is important to note that while the key milestones in the process can be summarized in a few pages, learning is a process and it takes time. Ava reflected:

Well I think it took us a lot longer than we thought to learn that we didn't have to assess everything. That was a hard thing, we just felt like we weren't fulfilling everything we needed to do if we didn't talk about every part of your unit where somebody was left out and then maybe they wouldn't get the attention they needed. They wouldn't get the funding they needed, something bad would happen because we left them out in the assessment plan thing... it was internally, nobody was telling you this but you just felt that. Finally learning to make it manageable, for your unit and that it was different for every unit.

Kezar (2014) emphasizes social cognition theories which focus on sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and learning, as important to the change process. The conditions that were established both from the existing institutional and divisional culture, as well as the trusting environment promoted by Ray and Samantha's agency nurtured rather than stifled the learning process for the Council. Sensemaking or learning appears to be a conduit among structure, culture, and agency as factors in the change process. The reflexivity among the three factors can be represented by learning. The next section discusses the prevalence of structures in the analysis as these are often the most easily visible to participants yet structures are often facilitators of learning and meaning making.

Structure, Structure, and More Structure

Building on the main structures, the SAREP position and the Assessment Council, throughout the next several years, Samantha and the Student Affairs Assessment Council

continued to produce structures to enhance their own and the division's understanding and practice of assessment as well as promote the culture of assessment. These structures included retreats, unit assessment committees, incorporating assessment into job descriptions, instituting the practice of reviewing one another's assessment plans, developing division-wide learning outcomes, utilizing technology, adding assessment focused positions, engaging in strategic planning, and the maintaining a non-hierarchical structure.

The Assessment Council began the practice of holding a one or two-day retreats, a structure, each summer to facilitate focused development of their assessment strategy for both themselves and the division. The Council chair prepared an agenda and minutes for the retreats and depending on the topic, the Council produced a tangible product from the retreats. The retreats were a time for planning and it was an opportunity for the Council to also produce a plan for their learning and work for the year.

The Council was largely made up of representatives from the various units in the division though not every unit participated. There were also members from outside the division as well, which speaks to the gravitas that the group held among the campus community. Over time, other structures proliferated, for example, some of the larger units established their own unit assessment committees with continued representation on the Assessment Council and many units began including assessment in the Council members' job descriptions which acknowledged the time and effort that was being dedicated to assessment in their role. Through these processes of reviewing one another's assessment plans, reflective practice, and ongoing meetings, the Council began to stitch together a more divisional picture of assessment and how what they were each

doing in their own units might fit together as a division. With the shift in focus to learning outcomes, they were moving from an inward, unit focus to a more divisional one that allowed them to create a set of division-wide learning outcomes in 2011. This would provide a foundation for later developments in the change process. The Assessment Council began incorporating technology into their work by utilizing different platforms that were sprouting up in the national landscape.

During this period, Ray prioritized resources, a structure, to support the work of the Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation and the Council. In 2008, a graduate assistant position was added to the unit and in 2011, two more graduate assistants and a full-time coordinator were added – another structure that helped to support the change. This was done in concert with divisional strategic planning being added to the unit's portfolio and with that the unit name changed to Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning (SAREP). Samantha led the division in a strategic planning process in 2011 in a similar fashion to how Our Campus Compact was developed – involving everyone in the division, inviting anyone to join any group, and endorsing a non-hierarchical approach to leadership of the identified initiatives. This connection back to the document demonstrates a consistency in the agency that was exhibited by Ray and Samantha and a manifestation of the values put forth in Our Campus Compact. Grace recalled her involvement as the new coordinator in SAREP, in the 'Encourage a Culture of Data-Driven Decision-Making' initiative group:

Samantha didn't ask me to go on that. Nobody asked me to do that, but I was like "Well I need to *get* data-driven decision-making. I need to get in on that.... I was a coordinator and it was a bunch of Directors and Assistant Directors, and I was able to lead that initiative. I think just empowering people to know that their voice is valued no matter what position they're in is really powerful. At least it has been for me.

The Assessment Council was clearly an important structure in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. Several participants characterized participation in the Council as a badge of honor. Even though the Council only asked for a two-year commitment, it was not uncommon for members to remain part of the Council throughout their tenure at CU with some founding members still part of the group (See Table 2). However, this and other structures were important to the change process, Thomas shared an insight that demonstrates the importance of the reflexivity of structure and culture. "That's the only reason it works. I could change policy all day, and systems all day. I have some degree of right to do that, but that's not how we roll here."

While structures are the easiest things to point to in a change process, the interaction between these structures, culture, and agency are critical though less visible. For example, the Assessment Council retreats provided an opportunity for deeper learning and reflection than their weekly meetings afforded. These retreats, while considered a structure, promoted learning because of the way Samantha facilitated them, her agency seemed to positively influence the change process in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division. Her approach provided the opportunity for the Committee to reflect on their practice and identify the next steps in their learning and how they could promote assessment practice among the division. Assessment Council members' personal values (culture) aligned with learning and assessment and this influenced their openness to learning. Learning represents the reflexivity between structure and agency and structure and culture in this example of the Assessment Council retreats. There was more to the retreats than learning, there was cake...

Recognition and Other External Influences

While structure, culture, agency, and learning proved to be strong “parent” codes that emerged through the analysis in NVivo, a fifth “parent” code emerged that was not anticipated in the initial study design. Recognition and other external influences developed as a key influence on the change process. Recognition refers to the various ways the Assessment Council was acknowledged for their work in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division as well as how they honored one another as group members. Because the recognition was both from internal and external sources I grouped recognition and external influences together as one “parent” code.

Recognition

Participants discussed several points of recognition that propelled the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs, (1) the ritual of cake as part of their annual retreats, (2) the commendation that the division of student affairs received from their regional accreditors regarding their assessment efforts, (3) the word clouds that were developed to recognize their service on the Assessment Council, and (4) the recognition Council members received from their functional area professional networks regarding assessment.

The final decision was cake. Two other features of culture that are present in CU’s division of student affairs are history and tradition. During the process of making arrangements to visit the campus for my study, I learned of possibly the most important tradition – cake. In my conversations with Thomas, he told me about their upcoming Assessment Council retreat and that they were in the process of surveying the group to determine the cake they would have at the retreat. Every participant mentioned the story

about cake. They shared that early on, Ray and Samantha were seeking a meaningful reward for the good work the Assessment Council was carrying out. Samantha brought the question to the Council and they discussed it for a while. They discarded suggestions like adding assessment to their job descriptions or some kind of monetary recognition and according to John:

The final decision was cake. Once a year, they would buy us a cake, and we'd celebrate. That was indicative of the council because all of us were there because we were enjoying what we were doing. We weren't doing it because it was part of our job description or for recognition or anything else.

Commendation. There were two things that each participant mentioned in their interviews, cake and the commendation the division of student affairs received acknowledging their assessment efforts during their reaffirmation of accreditation from their regional accreditor. This unanimous mention from each participant about these two forms of recognition is a powerful indication that recognition was important in the change process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs at CU. Grace shared:

We received a commendation for the assessment efforts in our division and the academics did not. That's referred to a lot. People really take pride in like-"Well we're doing really well in this area." So I think having that kind of history encourages people to want to keep doing well and keep striving to be successful in that area.

Word clouds. Ava recently left the Assessment Council and she shared that she was really glad to be part of such a great group and she was sad to leave. She shared another tradition – word clouds. The Council collects descriptive phrases of the departing member from other Council members and creates a word cloud as a gift and recognition of their service. This is a clever way to celebrate Council members via a form of assessment, a word cloud.

Regional and national. Samantha shared that a few members of the Council were recognized in their functional area field by being invited to present on assessment at regional and national conferences in their field. Samantha and Council members presented at national assessment conferences and were sought out by other conference attendees to learn more about their student affairs assessment work at CU. Samantha shared that this recognition was a huge incentive for Council members because it made them feel that their work was important and valued beyond CU and that it felt good to be on the leading edge of assessment at the time. Samantha felt that this was something that helped push through barriers when the group was struggling with some assessment learning.

Other External Influences

Participants discussed other external influences as important to the change process including (1) technology, (2) outsiders and their ideas, (3) evolution in the student affairs field, (4) graduate preparation programs, and (5) the influence of state budgets and the funding the university and the student affairs division received.

Technology. When CU division of student affairs began their efforts, technology was in a different place and this may have been an important influence on why the strategy of the Assessment Council was influential in the change process at that time.

John shared:

You kind of have to imagine 20 years ago too because if I wanted to do a weighted study of data, I would either have to go to the library and find some research book and run through the whole thing or... find a periodical that had contemporary information. Then you had to find a library that actually had a copy of that periodical... so having a group that got together and talked about different assessment issues was really valuable. Nowadays, if I wanted to figure out about weighted studies, I would just Google it and get probably 12 great answers and go from there.

Now that technology is more advanced, does a learning community in this form – a learning community that meets regularly to advance their learning of assessment - still a valid strategy? During the initial stages of the Assessment Council, regular meetings to discuss and learn about assessment worked well to build trust, foster learning, and develop a culture around assessment in the division. As technology has advanced, could other strategies achieve the same ends more efficiently? The proliferation of student affairs assessment literature along with technological advances make this information readily accessible to anyone interested in finding it. The form and purpose of the Council as a strategy for change is something the division grapples with later in the timeline.

Technology, as a structure, influenced the change process not only in terms of information availability, but also in terms of technology to support assessment practice that stemmed from the growing trend of assessment during this period (1994-2017). For example, Student Voice (now Campus Labs), was a platform that supported data collection and reporting efforts with tailored modules for different practices and different segments of campus. These kinds of technology developments were external influences on the change process in student affairs at CU in that they did not originate from within CU or student affairs. Technology promoted the sharing of information as the world wide web and internet became more commonplace on college campuses during this period. However, any time new technology was introduced, it required new learning so that end users could adopt it.

Samantha used technology when she regularly shared what she and the Assessment Council were creating via the SARE website and this invited questions and consultations from other universities to learn from what CU student affairs was doing

related to assessment. These inquiries boosted the confidence of the Assessment Council and reinforced that they were doing important work of which others were taking notice.

“Outsiders and their ideas”. CU invited “outsiders and their ideas” (Eckel and Kezar, 2003) to facilitate their learning and examine their processes to advance their practice. The Assessment Council brought multiple consultants to campus during the change period, some of which worked with them repeatedly. This spurred the pivotal practice of reviewing one another’s assessment reports and plans. The Council also hosted opportunities for faculty and staff to come together to share their assessment practice at a showcase and a symposium.

Evolution in the student affairs field. As the culture of assessment grew at CU in student affairs, there were also developments happening nationally related to assessment more broadly in higher education but also specifically in the student affairs field. The National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) began holding an annual conference on assessment and persistence. The ACPA – College Student Educators International started hosting an annual institute on student affairs assessment. Today, there are many other conferences, institutes, and other professional development opportunities focused on the practice of assessment specifically in the student affairs setting. The Student Affairs Assessment Listserv is a network of the growing number of professionals with 50-100% of their time dedicated to coordinating assessment efforts in a division of student affairs. As these efforts were initiated, Samantha and Assessment Council members attended and also presented at such conferences. Samantha shared:

We were able to go to conferences and I don't mean just me, but the person who didn't have much of a professional development budget in the Division, but

needed to go or wanted to go. They got to go. We began presenting and I would always, I never presented by myself. I always brought a group because I wanted people to understand that it wasn't me. I was the leader, but all these other people were making major contributions in their own right, but a lot of them were not directors or assistant directors or the people who usually get to travel and do that sort of thing.

Sarah shared what it felt like to receive Samantha's initiative around empowering others to present at conferences and receive the recognition they deserved for their hard work.

Sarah said:

[Samantha] encouraged me to go to an assessment and persistence conference and I did. The next time she encouraged me to present and I co-presented... I had to not only learn everything myself, but also learn it in a way that I could then teach it. That helped to increase my sense of confidence and agency as well.

These two quotes from Sarah and Samantha demonstrate four important points. First, receiving divisional resources, a structure, to support continued learning by attending conferences motivated the Assessment Council by recognizing their work as important and central to the division, Ray made this a priority among other competing needs. Second, presenting at those conferences was an important way for Council members to advance their learning and the recognition they received from doing that built their confidence and facilitated the learning process. Third, Samantha's shared leadership approach is evident in her desire to share recognition with members of the Council by encouraging them to attend and present at conferences regarding the good work they were doing. Lastly, Samantha had an intention with respect to conferences and the Assessment Council, she wanted to ensure that those who do not always get to attend conferences due to budget limitations or position level were the ones that got to not only attend but also present. She worked with Council members to support conference proposal writing and prepare presentations. And her intentions were received as she intended by Sarah. Messaging and framing are important strategies for leaders in the

change process but they are only effective when the messages are received as the leader intends. Samantha's intentions could have been interpreted differently by the Council and interfered with the change process. But because trust and vulnerability were norms in the group, Council members were willing to take the risk in learning in this way with Samantha as their guide.

Graduate preparation programs. As things were changing on the national landscape regarding student affairs assessment, graduate preparation programs began to adjust their curriculum to include assessment and research courses to better prepare student affairs professionals to work in the field. In addition to his role in a student affairs unit, William also served as an adjunct faculty member in CU's student affairs graduate preparation program where he taught a course on assessment. William and other participants noted that as younger professionals enter the field, they are bringing some knowledge or appreciation of assessment and this has influenced the change process especially in a culture where hierarchy is deemphasized. This may not be as strong an influence in cultures where hierarchy is more important as newer professionals may not be given the opportunity to lead and employ these skills derived from their graduate preparation program in such a way that would influence culture.

Resources. Ray discussed the low resource environment he was operating in as the leader of the division. This meant that he had to make difficult decisions about allocating limited resources. Ray's agency around the allocation of resources prioritized assessment in terms of the decision to create a position and office dedicated to research and evaluation, the addition of three graduate assistants and two coordinators to that office during his tenure, and his stated commitment to ensuring that resources were

available to support assessment in terms of Assessment Council professional development, technology, and consultants. These hard choices amplified his message that assessment is a priority.

Summary

Culture is not a monolithic entity; it is comprised of layers or categories (Schein, 2010). At CU, the institutional (organizational) and the divisional (macroculture) cultures influenced the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. For example, the classification as a research institution influenced the scholarly approach taken to implementing assessment at CU and the student-centered nature of both the institution and division provided a common frame for the purpose of assessment – to do our best work for students. In this chapter I summarized several key milestones in the change process at CU that reflect the structure-culture-agency change model. Some of the key structures identified include the title and reporting line of the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO), the vice provost for student affairs reports to the provost rather than the president and therefore has structural relationships with the other provost direct reports engaged in the learning enterprise. Other important structural milestones include the creation of the Assessment Council, the Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation position, and the practice of reviewing one another's assessment plans and reports. A key structure that also spans culture and agency is the creation of Our Campus Compact, a structural factor that reflects the values of the organization (culture) and the way in which Ray chose to develop the document (agency).

Some of the key cultural elements of the model included developing a common language for assessment in the division, establishing an important tradition such as having a delicious cake at the annual Assessment Council retreats, and honoring those who leave the group with a wordle. Some of the key agency elements include Ray and Samantha's leadership approaches that emphasized empowering others, vulnerability, trust, non-hierarchical structures, and learning.

In this chapter, I also emphasized the importance of the reflexivity between structure, culture, and agency in the change model and asserted that this reflexivity in this change process is learning. Both Ray and Samantha understood that learning is a process, an important one in growing a culture. They also recognized that learning about assessment involved ego risk and identity threat and so their form of agency which involved taking actions that built trust was critical to nurturing rather than forcing the change process.

CHAPTER FIVE FINDINGS:

TRANSITION IS ANOTHER WORD FOR CHANGE

Agency has been an integral element of the change process at CU, Ray's and Samantha's particular form of leadership and the actions they took to intentionally foster change propelled the formation and sustainability of a culture of assessment up to this point. The combination and balance of structural, cultural, and agentic factors would change dramatically over the next short period amidst significant transitions in leadership. In 2013, Samantha retired and Thomas was hired as the new Director of Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning. In 2014, Ray retired and Annie was hired as the new Vice Provost for Student Affairs. Over the next three years, Thomas would become the longest tenured direct report to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs as this level completely turned over between 2013 and 2017. Transition is another word for change. What happens when you insert a transition into a change process? It matters how you do it (agency).

Acknowledging the profound impact that Samantha had on the division in terms of the way she led the Assessment Council and carefully nurtured the change process, Ray understood that the Council had a specific identity, a shared set of values, norms, and traditions – he considered it a culture. Ray recognized that not just anyone could step in and take the helm of the assessment efforts and culture that had been initiated and owned by members of the division and then expertly cultivated by Samantha. He knew there was a great deal of loyalty and respect for Samantha in the division. He knew they were not just searching for a person but a person who espoused a set of values that aligned with their culture. Ray reflected on the transition during the hiring process:

We need somebody who will endorse the values of this group and who we are and the role that we play. All of a sudden, we had identity and it's like, we don't want to lose identity to somebody who wants to come in and wants to control the assessment culture but somebody who is going to keep breathing life into the assessment culture.

It was clear from talking with participants that they held Samantha in high regard not just for her leadership in assessment but also for the agency she used to foster a culture, a group identity, and a learning community in the Assessment Council.

Samantha understood this and she used her agency to facilitate the change process even after she decided to retire. Samantha shared:

People were nervous about who this next person was going to be. Would they change up everything? I talked about it. We talked very openly and I said, "You cannot expect this person coming in, whoever it is, to do stuff exactly like me. That's an unrealistic expectation and you'll be disappointed. They have to have room to make this position their own. Your job is to help them."

Samantha shepherded the transition between her and Thomas as the student affairs assessment leader by meeting with Thomas and sharing what the Assessment Council did, how they did it, and the essential elements and values of the culture they created. After Samantha facilitated a smooth transition with Thomas, she stepped back. Samantha shared:

When I left, I didn't want to be showing up in Thomas's face. You know? I needed to back away because there was, I think, a lot of loyalty to me. I didn't want to make it any harder than a transition has to be.

Losing Sight of the Shore

"One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight, for a very long time, of the shore." - André Gide (1925)

Imagining CU's change process as a journey, Samantha expertly navigated the Assessment Council through rough terrain and forged a path in the student affairs assessment world as it was taking shape. She and the Council trekked through ups and

downs and made their way to the shore where it was time to pause and take stock. It was at the shore where they could look back and see how far they had come and also acknowledge that there was further to go. This is where she turned over leadership to Thomas who invited the group to leave the shore and “discover new lands” that might involve different forms of transport. To discover new lands, they would need to cross oceans, and this would involve new learning and new ways of navigating and traveling.

Samantha indicated that her professional background focused on counseling psychology, this was the functional area from which she entered her role as the Director of SARE. Thomas shared that his professional background focused on education, research, and technology. Their paradigms for entering the work of student affairs research, evaluation, and planning were different and emphasized different elements. This is important because Samantha’s background in counseling psychology matched what the student affairs divisional culture seemed to need to nurture the newly started change process. Samantha and Ray’s self-described leadership styles seemed to align well and extend the vulnerable, trusting space described by participants. The milieu Samantha and Ray created seemed to promote a learning environment where failure was valued as a learning opportunity, an important component of the change process. Ray shared that Samantha brought expertise in cultivating a group that emphasized relationships, learning, and commitment to assessment. Samantha also entered the role of SARE Director from the CU community where she had been serving in another role in student affairs for eight years which she indicated granted her familiarity with the divisional and institutional culture. It appears that there was a strong match between Samantha’s professional background and her form of agency and what the culture of the

division needed to initiate and facilitate the change process in that culture/division. A different leader, with different characteristics, from outside the culture may not have had the same impact at that point in the change process. When Samantha retired from her position, she shared, “when I retired I told Ray, ‘we need somebody who knows how to do that sort of thing [using big data].’ I said, ‘That’s the next level for us so that people aren’t so focused on surveys.’” The division was at the shore, ready to bring in a new assessment leader that could take them to the next level.

A Prophet in Your Own Land

Oftentimes, a leader is not recognized as an expert within one’s own community, a community is usually more willing to recognize an outsider as an expert and this can influence the change process. Samantha did not consider herself an expert in her role as Director of SARE, she considered her role as a facilitator of learning, she was learning alongside the Council and facilitating rather than serving as an expert. This was an important element in the change process; her agency as *with* the community rather than agency *to* the community was a subtle key in her influence on the change process. According to Raven (1993) Samantha’s form of agency was referent or informational. Samantha drew agency (or power) from the referent base because her authenticity and vulnerability helped others identify with her and want to emulate her. Samantha drew agency from the informational base because she would share information with the Council and this led to change. These forms of power do not take on the role of “prophet” and so were effective at this stage of the change process.

The logic undergirding the idea that one cannot be a prophet in one’s own land indicates that change may be influenced by newcomers who would be afforded expert

power (Raven, 1993) by the community. Samantha indicated that she would receive calls from student affairs divisions at other institutions inquiring about their assessment practice and that she and the Council were invited to conferences to present on their work. While Samantha may have been considered an expert in assessment outside of CU, she did not use that form of agency (or power) to facilitate change within her own community. At the point of the SAAL transition, 13 years later, the Council and the stage of change was in a different place than in 2002 when Samantha took the formal leadership role. As Samantha prepared to retire, she recalled saying,

when I retired I had begun working with a group of people looking at, 'could some of the stuff that we were surveying around, could we get that information through other means, through using big data to do some of that?' In fact, when I retired I told Ray, "we need somebody who knows how to do that sort of thing." I said, "that's the next level for us so that people aren't so focused on surveys."

Thomas shared that during his interview, Ray asked him a question that indicated Ray's acknowledgement of Thomas's expertise. Thomas recalled Ray saying, "I've heard from a lot of people that you're very good at this work, that sort of thing. You're making some progress in areas we haven't been able to make progress towards." When Thomas joined the community, he brought this and other expertise with student affairs assessment, evaluation, and research. He *was* a prophet from another land and had the potential to bring expert power or agency and the Council and other members of the division gave Thomas expert power. According to John, this may have had unintended consequences.

It started out with no Director, with a director with no staff, and now Thomas has two staff members. I think that has brought us to the next level of quality of work that we do. I think the down side is that a lot of units now look and say, "Well that unit does assessment." It's not each of us doing assessment now, it's, "We'll wait for Thomas and his team to tell us what to do and then we'll do it because they're the assessment expert."

John's observation sheds light into the interaction of structure, a position, and agency, expert power, and the influence this can have on culture and change. If others share John's observation, the value and ownership of assessment can be diminished and may also stall the change process. John was a founding member of the Assessment Council and served on the Assessment Committee before that. His positionality touches on one of the distinctive features of higher education as an organization, employee commitment and tenure (Kezar, 2001). John was part of the division throughout the entire change process and he had expectations, perhaps tacit, for how assessment practice in student affairs at CU would continue. And once the leadership changed, so did that anticipated trajectory. It is unclear whether John's sentiments represent others' or not and whether his positionality and tenure make him less open to change that he is less in control of with a new leader.

Ray's form of agency was critical during this transition. He served as a bridge in the transition between SAREP Directors and this helped to hold the culture, frame the process, and provide a stable container for this transitional moment during the change process (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Thomas recalled that even during the interview process for the new director, Ray asked a telling question about the values he was searching for in this important transition:

Ray asked me a question during my interview that I thought was really important. He goes, "I've heard from a lot of people that you're very good at this work, that sort of thing. You're making some progress in areas we haven't been able to make progress towards." He's like, "I need to know if you're going to save your best work for home." I was like, "Yes. That's why I want to work for a land grant institution."

A Newcomer's Observations and New Vision

As a newcomer to the division, Thomas enjoyed a period of being an “outsider” (Eckel and Kezar, 2003) where his observations were not colored by patterns, habits, relationships, and other elements that dim one’s attunement to the obvious. In retrospect, Thomas shared four important observations about the culture of assessment in the division of student affairs when he arrived, (1) students first, (2) bright spots, (3) unit focus, and (4) definition of a learning community. In this section, I will describe these four observations, summarize Thomas’s vision for taking the culture of assessment to the next level, and some of the actions he took to facilitate change.

Four Observations

Students first. Thomas’s first observation was that the division held a common, pervasively displayed value of being student-centered – “making sure that we’re doing the best work for students.” Coming from another university, Thomas noted the student-centered focus of the division as different from any other institution he had experienced. He acknowledged that organizing the division around efforts that focused on improving the student experience (assessment) was easy because of the common value starting point.

I just think about the radical processes and changes we've made to the division in the last three or four years. We wouldn't have been able to make those processes unless people were on board, or saw a purpose, or have that sort of tunnel vision of, "We need to put students first and this is why we're doing that work."

As an outsider, Thomas may have noticed and appreciated this more so than others working in the division, who have prioritized the student-centered value for many years, it may have become less visible to them and just embedded in everyday work, it may have become an underlying assumption. This was an important observation for Thomas

given his role as a newcomer and holding the leadership position for coordinating assessment in student affairs. Thomas circled back to the student-centered culture in each of our three interviews, which emphasizes the importance he placed on this in his approach to crafting and carrying out his vision for taking the culture to the next level.

Bright spots. A second, observation Thomas had about the assessment culture in the division is that there were some “bright spots,” staff that were doing assessment really well. He also observed that staff were holding on to the structures they were used to in terms of their assessment reports and plans and they struggled with thinking on their own or exploring a different way. Thomas described it as a sense of being told to do something a certain way but there was no clear sense of where they received those messages. It seemed like what he was describing was an evolving set of assumptions that accreted into a practice subconsciously. Ava shared an example of this when she was discussing the awareness that learning is a long process and that sometimes it took them a long time to recognize that they were doing something based on tacit assumptions.

Well I think it took us a lot longer than we thought to learn that we didn't have to assess everything. That was a hard thing, we just felt like we weren't fulfilling everything we needed to do if we didn't talk about every part of your unit where somebody was left out and then maybe they wouldn't get the attention they needed. They wouldn't get the funding they needed, something bad would happen because we left them out in the assessment plan thing... it was internally, nobody was telling you this but you just felt that. Finally learning to make it manageable, for your unit and that it was different for every unit.

Thomas observed that this sense of rigidity or structure led to the work being limited to those on the Assessment Council and limited the permeation of assessment throughout the division. There was a great culture of assessment within the Council but not much beyond that. Thomas noted a disconnect between Council members, their supervisors, and ultimately the direct reports to the Vice Provost. His observation was that

assessment was occurring within the Assessment Council members which also meant locally within units.

Unit focus. Thomas characterized the strong assessment culture in the division as within the Assessment Council and as localized to what each unit was doing more discretely. He wanted to extend what units were doing individually and help them see how they were collectively contributing to the work of the division, that by connecting their work, they could tell a richer story and learn more deeply about student learning and their experiences. He wanted to shift ownership of data from the unit to the student. He wanted to build on the student-centered culture in the division of student affairs by helping units see that students do not experience or learn in the discrete silos of our units; students' experience and learning is fluid and the silos only serve administrators. This is a more sophisticated way of assessing student learning and experience – at the student level, rather than the unit level. Thomas was pointing the division to reflect on how their work with students contributes to the whole, divisionally agreed upon, outcomes and measures rather than just the unit's locally developed ones. Thomas's agency in seeing a new, more sophisticated way of structuring the division's assessment efforts to help the division learn fostered the change process and deepened the culture. Thomas picked up where Samantha left off in terms of division-wide learning outcomes and creating division-wide metrics so that the division could collectively understand how they were affecting student learning and development. This was a change in direction from the long term practice that was established by Samantha and the Assessment Council of attending more to unit impact. During one of my interviews with Thomas, I summarized, "It's sort

of helping people shift from, ‘My program had this impact,’ to ‘My program contributed to this impact collectively.’ And Thomas agreed:

Yes. Yes. And this is a university where that collective impact rings much more true. But for us, at the end of the day, it's like, yeah, let's talk across. Let's think about how we connect, and let's think about just that. What we're doing through these types of mappings, measure, et cetera, is actually... in a weird way, we're actually trying to disassemble our silos so we can actually reflect the student experience more accurately. Like, it's not that compelling, what we're doing, other than to say we're actually trying to get back to what students actually experience.

Definition of learning community. The fourth observation Thomas described was a discrepancy between how the Assessment Council defined learning community and how Thomas defined it. Each member of the Assessment Council described their experience with and the identity of the Council as a learning community. Thomas acknowledged that the Council holds the identity of a learning community and indicated that his perception of the way they would define learning community is a “spot for learning.” Thomas offered a different, more rigorous definition of a learning community that included several elements that he didn’t view as existing with the Council. He believes a learning community needs to have some level of structure and intention, a curriculum, regular attendance, so that learning can be scaffolded, and that members of the learning community have a responsibility to share their knowledge with others in the division, to teach others.

Vision and Action

With these observations, Thomas began to craft a vision for how to continue evolving the culture of assessment in the division and he did so with an awareness of how he was reading the current culture (Morgan, 2006) and the current leadership in the

division (Ray). From the beginning, Thomas was clear about how he wanted to approach his work, the form of agency he would use in his position:

... when I came in, I was pretty clear that I was going to bring a different approach to the office. I wasn't going to be in my office a lot. I'd be out at other people's offices... I think for me, the office was about more than it had been in regards to I didn't want to just be a support network. I wanted to be an active contributor in helping people tell their story, but also telling their story with them, not for them. That requires a lot of meaning making work and relationship building.

This different approach to leading assessment in the division would require more structures along with changes to existing structures in order to make it work. Some of these structures include a participation tracking system (swiping), a new reporting system, a liaison model for his office, and rethinking the Assessment Council as a structure. Some of these structures were entirely new and some were changes to existing structures.

Swiping. One of the early new efforts Thomas prioritized was developing a participation tracking system; this effort (swiping) addressed several of his observations about the culture when he arrived. First, it reinforced the concept that students learn and engage across the silos that are characteristic of organizations. For example, students may learn strategies for maintaining physical health and well-being by engaging in campus recreation activities or learn about their strengths and talents through a leadership development program in a leadership and involvement unit. By including participation in the equation of what they were measuring, the division could have a fuller picture of the impact they were having on student learning and development through their efforts. Additionally, they could learn things across the system rather than just for their own unit or program. But just implementing a swiping system, a structure, would not help staff see this more sophisticated way of assessing and evaluating their work with students.

Thomas understood that swiping student participation would only be an effective data point if it was consistently adopted across the division. Thomas's agency was important in facilitating adoption of this new technology and practice as well as addressing his observation that assessment was a strong culture among some people in the division (Assessment Council) but not throughout the organization, specifically with the direct reports to the vice provost for student affairs. Thomas discussed how before implementing the swiping system, he worked with Annie, the new vice provost for student affairs, and her direct reports to agree that they would all implement swiping or no one would.

Once all of the direct reports agreed to implement the swiping practice, Thomas and his team also needed to train the units on how to collect the data and then use it. This was a large capacity building effort that has helped the adoption of the new swiping practice. At the time of the study, the practice was still relatively new and while the collection of the participation data seemed to have been well adopted, there was less evidence that staff were accessing the data and using it to inform practice. Thomas and his team are continuing capacity building efforts to bring the division to a more even level of knowledge and adoption of accessing the reports they have created and using the data.

The swiping system is an example of the intersection of structure, culture, and agency and learning as the reflexive connector. The process and practice of collecting participation data along with the resources required to do so are structures. The leverage to get buy-in to ensure the practice would be adopted consistently across the division speaks to the shared value of 'students first', which is a shared element of the divisional

culture. And Thomas's efforts to convince others to collectively adopt the practice, so that a more complete picture of student engagement could be deciphered is agency. Therefore, all three components of the change model are present and learning is the current that connects them together. Learning is involved in staff accepting Thomas's position so that they could capture a more full picture of student learning and development, in staff adopting the new technology and the practice of swiping to track student participation, and in staff learning how to go into the system to retrieve the data to form the new, fuller picture.

From annual report to term report. A key structure that Thomas changed was the annual report. When he first arrived, he changed the structure of the report to make it more consistent among the units and to align with upstream reporting that was required based on the unit annual reports. This was a precursor to a larger change that was to come. In 2016, the division engaged in strategic planning once again and as with previous efforts, the entire division was involved in the process. What was different about it this time was that Thomas wanted to address his observations that assessment was localized to the Assessment Council and those "bright spots" that he noted when he first arrived. He wanted to engage more levels of the organization, particularly the direct reports, in the assessment process. With the support of the vice provost, Thomas designed a structure for accountability with the strategic plan goals that led to a transformation of the annual report and assessment reporting process that also aligned all three together. With input from the direct reports and the Assessment Council, Thomas transformed the annual report process into a full cycle assessment that wraps up into the strategic plan. He designed a term reporting process whereby each unit responds to a set

of prompts each term; the prompts were co-designed by the direct reports, Assessment Council, and Thomas's staff. The prompts ranged from planning to reporting results depending on the term and each term's prompts are built from the previous term's responses and units can easily reference their responses from the previous term through the elegant structure that Thomas created. According to Thomas, the term report process:

meets our accreditation requirements, it meets what our provost asks for and simultaneously, it means we don't have to wait till the end of the year to know whether or not we were successful in our goals towards the strategic plan... we made it much more laser beamed.

This structure is important for several reasons. First, it streamlined a laborious process, the annual report, which in its previous form left all of the reflection and opportunity for change in response to data to one point in the year and instead built in multiple points of reflection and change throughout the year. Second, the prompts were intentionally aligned to not only the local assessments being done in the units but also to the divisional strategic plan. This addressed another observation of Thomas's, that units were more focused on their individualized efforts rather than viewing themselves as a collective, fluid experience for students. Third, the process incorporated elements from social cognition theories of change (Kezar, 2014), which point to the importance of learning. The term reporting process made it easier for unit staff to see the connections between their localized work and the work of the division as well as how it links from term to term. And fourth, it changed the relevance of the assessment plan and reports because it replaced them and simultaneously replaced the Assessment Council practice of reviewing one another's plans and reports which was a critical learning experience for the group and milestone in the change process.

Liaison model. One of Thomas's observations when he arrived was that the Assessment Council identified themselves as a learning community but he had a different definition of a learning community. This meant he had different ideas about how he wanted to engage the Council. Thomas believed that a learning community needed to involve regular attendance, scaffolded learning opportunities, and a curriculum. It is unclear when attendance became more variable, participants reported a sense of commitment during Samantha's tenure generally however, Thomas indicated that variable attendance made it difficult to pursue a learning agenda with the group. He saw this as critical for extending assessment beyond the Council and permeating strong assessment practice more widely throughout the division as well as deepening the capacity of the Council. To address this, Thomas reallocated resources so that he could add another coordinator position to his unit bringing his total staff to two full time coordinators and four graduate students. This additional staffing and shifting to the term reports allowed him to take a different approach to the peer review process that had formerly resided in the Assessment Council. Together with the Assessment Council, he was able to develop a liaison model whereby he and his coordinators divided the units in the division among them and they began meeting with the unit once per term in alignment with the new term reporting process. The meetings included the person responsible for assessment in the unit as well as the director. This new practice, a structure, provided regular, structured touchpoints between the SAERP office and the units, fostered deeper relationships between one member of Thomas's team and the unit, and allowed SAERP staff to take an approach that focused on co-creating meaning rather than just providing feedback or crunching data for the unit. Thomas described how he

facilitated the termly meetings with units. He shared that he would take out his laptop and ask questions of the data *with* the unit rather than *for* the unit where:

Now, it's become this thing where they see [the liaison meetings] as a sacred moment in which they can actually reflect and hit the pause button. We're bringing all the work to them and we're saying... I'll show graphs on the projector. I'll be like, "What do you see? What's going on here?"

This shift from 'call us if you need us' to 'multiple structured conversations' was an important one that perhaps could not have happened without a change in leadership. Thomas was intentional and clear when he stepped into the SAAL role that he wasn't going to be in his office much, that he would be out meeting with others. This is connected to how he sees his role and how it has evolved over time.

My role within the division and our office's role becomes one of the less of the keeper of the keys in regards to the data, but the helpers of meaning making and also the helpers at making this as transparent as we can.

This approach to the work also empowers others to use data. Thomas shared an example of working with the director of housing and dining where together, they reviewed the unit's participation data. Together, they learned that what the director thought was happening was not being supported in the data. He thought they were offering high numbers of floor programming in the first few weeks of the term yet the data showed that most of their programming was occurring during mid-terms. The process of Thomas sitting down with the director, answering his questions in real-time with the participation data serves several purposes and supports social cognition theories of change (Kezar, 2014) which emphasize the process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

First, the data provided useful information that helped the unit do their jobs better and serve students more effectively – a value of the division so a good match. Second, Thomas was teaching the director how to access and use the participation data which is a

practice that was minimally adopted in the division at the time data was collected for this study. And finally, when assessment data are used, it demonstrates how assessment can be an effective means for improving programs and services to best support student learning and development. When others see that data are useful, it can promote adoption of assessment as a practice.

The Assessment Council and its future. The Assessment Council was born from a grassroots effort of the Assessment Committee, which emerged from an initiative generated from Our Campus Compact. The Assessment Committee met for six years and made three proposals to create a position, the director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation, to lead the division's assessment efforts. The third proposal was accepted by Ray, the position was created, and the Assessment Council became the Assessment Committee. Several artifacts from the divisional website support how the Council was formed and how it would operate:

- “Membership is open to anyone who will commit to learning about assessment, actively participating, and helping others to learn.”
- “Functioning as a learning community - one that consistently advances its own learning and uses its acquired knowledge to consult with individuals and groups”
- “Council membership will be solicited from volunteers from within Student Affairs and other CU units. Members will be asked to commit to a two-year service term, with the option of recommitting for an additional term.
- The Council will be chaired by the Director of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation. Activities will be pursued through a division-of-labor format, to be determined by members of the Council.”

Participants' accounts of their experience with the Assessment Council reinforce the intentions captured on the website. While it is unclear when attendance became more variable, several participants noted this currently. Thomas struggled with the contradiction he experienced with his view of a learning community and his observation of the current form of the Assessment Council.

Thomas described a different view of what a learning community is and what might be needed to advance to the next level. He thinks it is important to have an agenda and outcomes for the Council's learning and this requires more structure than what had previously been embodied. He wanted to teach more advanced forms of research and evaluation that would require sustained commitment from Council members rather than what was currently described as people moving in and out of the group or inconsistent attendance at meetings. It seems that Thomas's view of a learning community may have more of a focus on content whereas the former view of a learning community may have had a focus more on process. And these differing views may reflect that a different approach is appropriate at different stages of change maturity.

Among participants, there was uncertainty as to the future of the Assessment Council, the core of the division's assessment culture, and whether it would stay the same or be transformed into something different. Emma shared, "I don't know what it [the Assessment Council] will look like this year and who will all be there." Regarding meeting frequency, Sarah reflected "With assessment council, we were meeting every other week where now we're only meeting once a month, so we'll see how that works too." This uncertainty seems to reflect more about the structure of how the Assessment

Council operates rather than a question as to the future of the culture of assessment in student affairs at CU.

The Messy Part

When asked about what was challenging about the change process, Thomas shared that capacity building was most difficult. He described the dissonance between his view of a learning community – a more structured group that follows an intentionally set curriculum designed to advance the division’s assessment practice and culture - and the current state of the Assessment Council – a more fluid group of individuals committed to learning about assessment and advancing the division’s assessment practice and culture - as a bridge that needed to be crossed by building capacity. When members of the division and the Council are at varying levels of understanding of assessment and research concepts it makes moving forward or advancing to a more sophisticated level as a division very complicated. This results in pockets of strong assessment practice rather than a robust culture across the division. This ‘messy part’ of building capacity as described by Thomas contradicts the direction Thomas has forged regarding helping the division understand that learning does not happen in silos for students. The ‘messy part’ also leads to questions about the necessary level of permeation throughout a division of student affairs to be considered a culture of assessment.

Thomas discussed the several ways he tried to engage this challenge (agency). He shared that he tried to have a current Council member co-chair the group (structure) with him and co-create the agendas (agency), yet none were willing to do so. He also changed the meeting frequency and added more structure to the meetings by creating an agenda and a curriculum (structures) but the variable attendance (agency) limited the

connectedness of the learning. He also tried opening up the Council meetings to anyone in the division to expand the opportunity for learning. None of these efforts have seemed to stick yet and attendance at Council meetings remains variable.

Grace shared that she experiences the “messy in terms of trying to figure out how to change things and how to keep making things relevant and better.” At CU, Thomas and his team are initiating new change within an ongoing change process. This means they are trying to spur innovation and progression by possibly changing something that was a critical driver of change at an earlier stage in the change process but is now more maintaining the status quo like the discontinued practice of reviewing one another’s assessment reports. This can create uncertainty for those involved in the process, especially those who preceded the current leader making the change. Regarding the shift from annual reporting and reviewing one another’s assessment plans and reports to the new term report process, Sarah shared, “I don’t know. I’m not really sure what to expect yet.”

Grace reflected a sentiment of continuous improvement among the Council when she shared that the commendation from the regional accreditor served to amplify their responsibility to keep advancing with assessment, rather than grant permission to rest on their accomplishments. But at this point in the change process, there seems to be some question about advancing, at least in the way Thomas is envisioning. John, a founding member of both the Assessment Committee and Council shared, “I think everybody sees it as valuable because it’s creating richer data, but yeah, I think it also just changes the personal ownership of it some.” And Samantha reflected, “I think there is a culture of assessment in Student Affairs because of the history. I don’t know how that’s continuing

because I know that people that were in it for a long time have left and retired.”

Samantha’s observation indicates that she thinks the culture lives within the people who were part of it for a long time, she seems to question whether it can continue if those people are no longer part of the Council or division. She emphasizes history as a critical element for fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.

Inquiry

Prior to Thomas’s arrival, the student affairs division engaged in a strategic planning process which yielded an initiative – “the division of student affairs will build and sustain a robust culture of data-based decision-making and planning.” As with the Our Campus Compact, organically formed groups began to develop the initiative and after grappling with it determined the initiative should be reframed to focus on building and sustaining a robust culture of inquiry. As with many strategic plans, this initiative of building and sustaining a robust culture of inquiry was more of an espoused theory rather than a theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1996) at this point. When Thomas arrived, he saw an opportunity to use this language around inquiry as a mechanism for elevating the culture of assessment to the next level. Regarding inquiry, he shared, “I see it as an umbrella that includes assessment, evaluation, and research, simply”... Asking questions to improve, or asking questions about our practices, and having that... sacred space in which people could actually reflect on their practice.” Thomas saw this shift in language from “assessment” toward “inquiry” as an overarching concept that captures the various practices of assessment, evaluation, and research as an opportunity to propel the change through learning and curiosity.

More Transition at the Top

The student affairs assessment leader transition was not the only major transition to occur in this short period of time. A year after Samantha retired, Ray retired from the Vice Provost of Student Affairs position. Annie transitioned into the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) role from her current role in academic affairs. Several aspects about Annie's previous role and her agency are important to the success of this transition. First, Annie had been a part of the CU community in her former role in academic affairs and part of the Provost's leadership team for six years before stepping into the CSAO position. She knew the institutional and divisional culture because Ray was part of the Provost's leadership team due to the reporting structure, which fostered shared leadership for the learning enterprise. Annie also played a significant role in the recent institutional reaffirmation of accreditation process, which helped her understand the importance of assessment for accreditation purposes and how to make it into something meaningful rather than an exercise to satisfy accreditors. Through her role in the reaffirmation process, she recognized the strong assessment practice in student affairs and had previously reached out to Ray and Samantha to consult with academic affairs on how to improve their assessment efforts. Before Annie entered the role as Vice Provost for Student Affairs, she had an understanding of the institutional and divisional culture, she had relationships with the division of student affairs through her previous role, and she had an appreciation for the quality assessment work and culture being created in student affairs. Each of these elements smoothed her transition and created less disruption in the transition within the change process.

The significance of a transition in the CSAO position is not to be understated, especially when the impact of the outgoing leader was such an intimate one. Each participant spoke of their relationship with Ray as an active one, many CSAOs are removed from their staff whereas Ray seemed to be in relationship with his staff at deeper levels of the organization than most. This transition had the potential to have deep impact in the organization. When a new leader comes in, the opening for change at the structural level is great. A new leader may reorganize the division, terminate employees, bring employees to the organization that they have previously worked with, and align structures (resources, processes, practices) to new priorities which may or may not be consistent with the previous leader. These typical events that occur with a CSAO leadership change can have a strong impact on the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. And this impact can be positive or negative. Ray and Annie's leadership styles are similar and different in important ways that will be described next.

Similarities in Agency

One of the ways Ray's and Annie's agency is similar is that they both value assessment as a critical practice in student affairs. Annie discussed the importance of evidence-based practice in her field of study as an academic and her experience with the institutional reaffirmation of accreditation as contributing to her value of assessment. Because she espouses this value, any structural changes she made reflected the importance of assessment as a professional value she holds. Ray also values assessment and they both demonstrated this value in three important ways. First, both Ray and Annie allocated scarce resources to assessment in the forms of staff positions in the

SAREP office. During Ray's tenure as vice provost for student affairs, he allocated resources to create the first director of SAREP position, then added one coordinator and two graduate assistants to the office. During Annie's tenure, she allocated resources to add another coordinator position to the office.

Second, both Ray and Annie described strategies they used for keeping assessment "on the menu." Ray shared that assessment was a consistent item on his leadership team's agenda, each time they met, Samantha or others had the opportunity to provide updates, discuss challenges, or introduce new ideas regarding assessment. Around the time Ray retired, so did several of his direct reports. This meant that Annie hired several new employees and she ensured that a commitment to assessment was a criteria for filling these positions.

Third, they both empowered members of the division to carry out assessment and make decisions to improve their work and impact on students. Ray and Annie fostered a sense of trust. Annie discussed how she empowers the division through messaging:

What I say is... and I've said this literally at the start of three workshops or professional developments, "I hereby grant every one of you the authority and permission and the initiative to go and make change in the division. We will not make meaningful change unless you feel empowered. I hereby empower you. Don't wait for my permission. Don't wait for your unit head's permission. Go and think. Do your best thinking. Engage deeply with the information we have to transform our environment."

Messaging is an important form of agency for a positional leader and it creates a specific culture. Grace and Sarah shared evidence that Annie's and Ray's messaging was consistent across the transition and it was received as they intended. Grace shared a milestone in the change process as an expression of a value that was put forth by both Ray and Annie. She shared that:

the values that are put out from the Vice Provost office and like Annie or Ray that this [assessment] is important and really believing that you can try things, new things, and not be penalized for it. Also having her saying over and over again that "Hey, it's okay to fail as long as we learn from it and keep trying to improve."

Sarah also discussed the same value as a milestone which demonstrates that Ray and Annie's messaging were heard by multiple individuals in the same way and that members of the division internalized these messages and values as a representation of the culture.

Sarah shared:

Then looking at if that didn't work, why didn't it, what do we need to do differently, versus feeling like we're going to be in trouble if we didn't get the numbers that we were supposed to. That sentiment or that kind of, that culture has been something that's been I think emphasized throughout the years. Even in, we have a lot of change happening at our university and a lot of turnover in the last few years. Even though the Vice Provost I worked with earlier is not the same as now and they have very different approaches, that sentiment is still there that where the assessment is something for us to dig into deeply and to learn from, but not to feel like we're in trouble if we got negative results, as long as we're using that critically to make changes, right? I think that's something that has also allowed us to help grow that assessment culture is knowing that we're not going to get in trouble if we don't get the best results.

This consistency in valuing assessment as a divisional priority and demonstrating that value through actions was an important element in ensuring this significant leadership change did not disrupt the positive trajectory of change in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division.

Differences in Agency

In Sarah's comment, she picked up on how Ray and Annie's leadership approaches are different. Similar to how Samantha and Thomas's approaches are different, so were Ray and Annie's in some important ways. First, at the time of this study, Ray had been at CU for 22 years and had a long time to develop relationships with members of the division. And it was clear that being in relationship with others was a central part of his leadership approach. While Annie had been at CU for nine years, she

had only been in her role as vice provost for student affairs for three years and it seemed like staff were still trying to figure her out as the leader of the division.

Second, Ray described his leadership approach as one that empowers others and follows the energy of the group. At CU, he acknowledged the low resource environment operating at the time and that the limited resources he had access to would be optimized through following the energy rather than through determining who was not doing what was asked. Ray's approach matched what the culture needed at the time to be receptive to change. A different approach may have stifled change. Instead, Ray's approach fostered trust and empowered the Assessment Council to do great work and create a position and then office to support that work so that it could grow and expand a culture of assessment. Annie's approach was a bit different and again, matched the culture in its current stage of maturity at the time she began as the vice provost for student affairs. While Annie also empowers members of the division to collect data, make decisions, and enact change she also builds in some measures of accountability. This is a departure from the approach Ray took for his 19-year tenure as the vice provost for student affairs. Ray's approach of following the energy of the group was one that members of the division had grown accustomed to and it was part of the culture.

The "A" Word

The word 'accountability' has become a ubiquitous term in higher education and has been used as a weapon to force change in the field. Therefore, the term has baggage and can be internalized as a way to punish an individual for the assessment results collected regarding an initiative. Ewell (2009) discusses the two tensions for the purpose of assessment, at one end of the spectrum is accountability and at the other, improvement.

Given the value-laden nature of the term ‘accountability’ it is important to distinguish that when used in this study, accountability refers to having integrity about following through on intentions rather than punishing an individual for negative assessment results. And as stated in the definition of culture of assessment used for this study, the purpose of assessment is improvement. For example, learning outcomes can be viewed as an intention and accountability refers to a commitment to understanding the extent to which the learning outcomes were met by an initiative for the purpose of making decisions about the value the initiative can bring to the intended learning. It does not refer to an individual experiencing negative consequences (getting in trouble) for negative assessment results related to the initiative.

The SAAL position and accountability. The most common structures related to student affairs assessment implementation is a student affairs assessment leader (SAAL) position or in the absence of that, a general expectation that members of the division complete assessment. In the scenario where a SAAL position exists, this person must rely on others to actually complete the assessments, the SAAL is not completing the assessments for members of the division, their role is often teacher, coach, and resource connector. And in most cases, the SAAL does not have reporting line authority with the units in the division, where the assessments are being completed. Accountability for completing assessment lies with someone other than the SAAL, however the SAAL is accountable for coordinating assessment for the division and creating a culture of assessment therein, See Figure 6 for a sample organizational chart representing these relationships. This inconsistency requires the SAAL to operate outside of traditional means of accountability and authority. This is also the case in the other model where

there is no SAAL position and a general expectation exists for completing assessment. Similarly, accountability is diffuse and can be a reason for uneven adoption of assessment within a division of student affairs. When asked about how she addressed resistance or lack of follow through on assessment, Samantha shared, “That was Ray's. I was not their supervisor, their disciplinarian.”

If a culture of assessment requires a certain level of permeation throughout the division then some form of accountability is required to ensure it gets permeated enough. With Ray’s approach – following the energy rather than holding people accountable, it leaves the SAAL in a difficult position. Samantha recalled:

I don't know if he ever really did anything because people still didn't produce, so I don't know what his part of it was. I still offered to meet with them. I still provided them opportunities, but I wasn't in a position to do anything about it.

Participants also talked about who was missing from the Assessment Council in that some units in the division were not represented in the group. And they knew that some were not making an earnest effort to assess their initiatives but rather implemented rote forms of assessment that satisfied the expectation that they completed an assessment but with no real meaning. Beyond Samantha, other participants knew that some units never submitted an assessment report; they were not sure about how those folks were held accountable for the expectation to do assessment. Ray shared that it was addressed in the performance evaluation process, which complicates things because this is a confidential conversation between supervisor and employee. The way that staff members are held accountable in the performance evaluation process cannot be shared with others and in the absence of trust, this could deflate the assessment culture. But the Council and the division had trust in Ray and Samantha and it did not seem to have this effect.

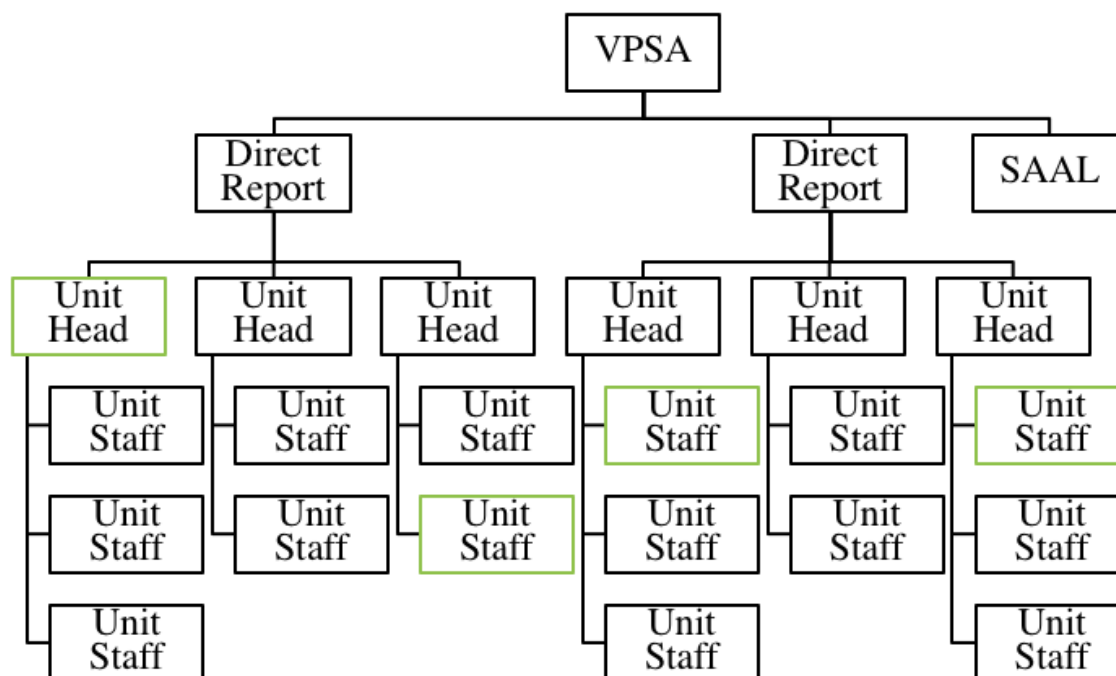


Figure 6. Sample organizational chart demonstrating the relationship between the Vice Provost for Student Affairs (VPSA), the direct reports (other leaders in the organization), the student affairs assessment leader (SAAL), and members of the assessment council (noted as unit boxes highlighted in green).

Again, Ray's leadership approach seemed to be the right one at that time to allow the roots of the culture to take hold, to build trust, and to foster learning. With the benefit of having a strong root structure and a sturdy foundation, Annie and Thomas were able to take a slightly different approach. Where they built on the student-centered values of the division, empowering others, fostering trust and learning, they also added in some structures to encourage accountability in the processes related to assessment and planning and clearly linked them together. Grace shared:

When Ray was Vice Provost he would always kind of encourage people that if you have an idea that you think is worth pursuing that you should get the people together and pursue it basically. Annie, I think, continues to have a similar style around that in that she's encouraging innovative thinking, but maybe wants a little more organized approach to it which I think is good because some of the stuff that

would start and stop before would... Like Annie's a little more outcomes-driven. She wants to see what's going to come out of it.

Grace went on to discuss her impression of the change in leadership style between Ray and Annie:

I feel like if we just keep going in that way [following the energy] things would be stagnant. I think that bringing more structure to that [our assessment efforts] with the collection of participation data, that's required a lot of structure and participation on the parts of the units and a lot of kind of Annie reinforcing "This is important" and Ray before that kind of backing up what our office (SAREP) is encouraging people to do.

Introducing accountability. While Annie brought more accountability to the vice provost position and assessment processes, she balanced it with extending the agency that Ray took up which fostered learning, trust, empowerment, and safety to fail as long as learning was the intention. Some examples of the ways Annie endorsed more accountability in the assessment practices included building in a step of the term report process where Annie's direct reports send an email to Annie and Thomas indicating that they have read and approved the information contained in their unit(s) term report. This helped to address Thomas' observation that the strong culture of assessment was present in the Assessment Council but didn't permeate much beyond that, especially with Annie's direct reports. It is also important to note here that during the vice provost for student affairs transition, several of the direct reports retired or moved on from their positions and Annie was able to hire new people into those positions. In so doing, she indicated that she sought and hired individuals who value and prioritize assessment in their work.

Another form of accountability that Annie introduced during her tenure was through the 2016 divisional strategic planning process. As with past strategic planning processes, the entire division was involved in developing the plan however, what was

different about this process was that Annie placed accountability for goal implementation with the direct reports. She paired up direct reports to co-lead efforts related to the goals and this had two effects. One, it closely connected the direct reports to the work of their units with the strategic plan goals and two, it built on an intact group with regular meeting structures to work together across the goals thus supporting the direction of a more collective approach to assessment that aligns with the division's goals. To tie the term reporting process and divisional strategic plan more closely together, the direct reports are expected to submit a 75-day and 150-day plan annually that connects the work of the units with the divisional goals. One other way Annie implemented more accountability was by linking discretionary funds to the submission of what used to be the annual report, and assessment plans and reports and is now the term reports.

Annie shared that she was able to make these changes toward accountability because she was “building on the foundation of people who are committed to assessment” and this allowed her to start there rather than from the beginning. She was building on a strong foundation and different leadership approaches were available to her that perhaps would not have been at the start of a change process. This reinforces the point that the leadership approach (agency) must match the culture and the stage of change and that a leader must have the skills of reading (Morgan, 2006) and the ability to adapt one's approach accordingly to carefully facilitate the change process. Grace shared:

But again, it [support for assessment as a priority for the division] was always reinforced by Annie or Ray too. Yeah. I think kind of overall starting out as a grassroots type effort and then moving into something that's not very rigid but a little more structured and continuing the reinforcement from leaders, I think, has... I think that's been an important move to kind of keep the energy and the

movement going rather than just kind of like "Okay. We've got... We're good at this."

Influences from other fields. Annie discussed two areas of thinking that influenced her approach to assessment and leadership – improvement science and design thinking. Some of the premises of these areas that she shared as relevant to her role and fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs include rapid assessment cycles and ending initiatives that are not providing the value they anticipate. Annie shared:

But, part of saying, "You are now empowered," is trusting that people have good ideas, know more than we do at the top about what needs to happen to transform a program, and should be empowered to put that into action and try some things out. And fail. We need to try many, many more things than those that stick and work. And so, we have this attitude of, "We're going to try some things that are not going to work and that's great, because we're going to learn from them and then we're going to try something else. But we're not going to allow those things that don't work to trail on. We're going to just end them."

An example of this that Annie discussed was the use of the data and reporting features related to the swiping system they had recently implemented. Annie shared that she sent a clear message at a recent retreat that reinforces improvement science and design thinking.

So, I'm going to be really clear here. We've invested a lot of resources in creating this data and assessment infrastructure and very few people have used it to date. And you're going to be voting with your clicks, effectively, because we know who's using it, who isn't, how it's being used, how it isn't, and if I don't see a massive uptick in people actually using the data, there's no reason to continue this investment." And everybody says, "Yes, we want to use it, we want to use it, we just need help." So, that was a positive moment where I had to be really clear, because I'm facing budget cuts this year.

There are several important elements to this passage from Annie. First, she demonstrates clear messaging about accountability – she will use data to understand if the human and fiscal resources invested in the swiping and data reporting systems are being

utilized to their full potential and if they are not, she will reallocate the resources.

Second, this more direct messaging supports her broader messaging in the passage captured on the previous page where she discusses the trust she has in members of the division to be empowered to make decisions, try new things, and learn from failure. She acknowledges that they will need to try many more things than those that will stick and this is an example of something they tried at the division level that she is using as an example. And finally, Annie's passage reflects the most complex part of a new initiative and change, learning. While the swiping portion of the initiative was adopted by the division fairly readily, the use of the data is a much slower adoption process because this requires new learning. The SAREP office created a system whereby units could access the data collected by swiping however it involved new technology and a new practice that members of the division had to learn. And this takes time both because it was a new way of approaching the work – shifting from a unit focus to a divisional focus – and because it was a new skill that most had to develop.

Shortly after data collection for this study, Annie left CU to work at a different institution and I do not have information about the impact this may have on the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment at CU.

Summary

While this chapter focused on the transitions in leadership, agency, over the past few years in CU's student affairs division, it is not possible to discuss the impact of these leadership transitions on the change process without identifying how agency interacts with structure and culture as well as the reflexive process of learning and the impact of external influences. Samantha's retirement from her position as the Director of Student

Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning, disrupted the trajectory of the history of the change process. Folks who had been there for a long time and built the assessment culture alongside her had an expectation that the history that they constructed would continue along the same line until Samantha retired and a new leader stepped in, Thomas. These elements of history, culture, and Samantha's form of agency, along with a new person in the Director position, a structure, intersected to create a significant transition within the change process. This chapter discussed how Samantha used her agency to facilitate a smooth transition and how Thomas brought with him expert power (Raven, 1993) and an objective lens to apply to what had become tacit for the division over time. Thomas's observations of the culture – students first, bright spots of assessment within the division, a unit focus to assessment, and a question about the definition of a learning community – were available to him as a newcomer in ways that were not available to long-time community members because they had become tacit assumptions, an element of culture.

Thomas utilized this newcomer perspective to create a vision and actions, agency that built on the strong culture that had been established by Samantha and the Assessment Council. These actions – implementing swiping, term reports, the liaison model, and also reimaging the Assessment Council – are a combination of putting structures in place and taking up agency in such a way that shaped the assessment culture of the division. At this point in the change process, the impact of these actions are not yet clear and as a newcomer, Thomas did not experience the trust and buy-in that his predecessor may have benefitted from when implementing changes. This chapter also discussed 'the messy part' involved in evolving the change process. Thomas identified the messy part as

capacity building, learning, in a way that brings evenness to the division's understanding and aptitude to implement assessment practice. This learning represents the arrows or reflexivity among structure, culture, and agency, and points to the importance of social cognition theories of change (Kezar, 2014).

In addition to the transition at the SAAL level, there was a transition at the vice provost for student affairs level during this period as well. The chapter discusses the similarities and differences in leadership approach, agency, among the two leaders and emphasizes the role accountability plays in the change process. First, the SAAL position typically requires a nontraditional form of agency to actually ensure staff with no reporting relationship, a structure, to engage in meaningful assessment. Second, accountability around assessment was introduced into the student affairs culture after a long period where accountability was deemphasized. Ray took a different approach, agency, to encouraging assessment and following the energy and this was an approach that matched the culture of the division and the stage of change at the time. This introduction of accountability was a change to the culture, the way things had been done for a long time, and structures and learning helped facilitate the adoption of accountability in the division. And finally, Annie shared thinking from other fields that influenced her approach to assessment and the culture she envisioned for the division.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Study Summary

While there are dissenting perspectives about the value of a college degree, both endorse the responsibility of higher education institutions to demonstrate the value of the degree (Spellings Commission Report, 2006). The individualistic perspective emphasizes the return on investment an individual realizes from a college degree, which focuses on economic factors. Alternatively, the common good perspective expands on the individualistic perspective and stresses two additional benefits from a college education: the value that extends to the community when its members are college educated as well as the cognitive, affective, and practical learning afforded through a college education. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the Lumina Foundation, and scholars such as Bowen (1977) have established a more holistic perspective on the learning and development that occurs during college and therefore defines the value of the degree. This more holistic perspective encompasses the learning that occurs not only inside the classroom but extends to include co-curricular learning and development that occurs outside the classroom and this brings student affairs into the conversation.

Regardless of the kind of learning taking place during college, higher education is called to demonstrate the value of that learning and assessment is a means for doing so. However, higher education has been slow to adopt this practice (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Despite foundational values that emphasize assessment of student learning and development (American Council on Education Studies, 1937 &

1949), literature to support co-curricular assessment, and investment of resources in the field, student affairs has also been slow to adopt assessment extensively (Blimling, 2013; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2010; Elkins, 2015). One of the ways student affairs is investing resources in assessment is through student affairs assessment leader (SAAL) positions. These positions have responsibility for coordinating assessment efforts for a division of student affairs dedicating all or a portion of their time to these efforts. This trend in addressing the challenge of implementing assessment of student learning and development in a division of student affairs has not been studied empirically; three studies examined assessment in student affairs generally and offer best practices for the contexts studied (Bresciani, 2002; Green, Jones, Aloï, 2008; Seagrave & Dean, 2010). These studies were limited in that they only studied certain institution types, lacked a theoretical grounding, and did not frame their inquiry as a change process.

Aside from these studies, several books and articles now comprise the student affairs assessment literature. Student affairs assessment leaders can rely on this literature which focuses on the rationale for co-curricular assessment (e.g., Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie, 2016), the mechanics of co-curricular assessment (e.g., Henning & Roberts, 2016), or some recent literature providing guidance for coordinating assessment in student affairs (e.g., Yousey-Elsener, Bentrim, & Henning, 2015). However, the process of implementing assessment in a division of student affairs is a complex undertaking; if it were easy, co-curricular assessment would be more widely adopted in the field. The extant research focuses on best practices and the remaining literature is based on valuable practitioner experience and can be strengthened with empirical study. Framing empirical study of the complex process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in

student affairs as a change process draws on multidisciplinary perspectives to inform this study.

Kezar (2014) characterizes student learning outcomes assessment as a second-order change, a more complex type of change that involves addressing “underlying values, assumptions, structures, processes, and culture” (p. 49). Change University is commonly known in the student affairs assessment field as having a strong culture of assessment which represents second-order change. The rationale for selecting this case is supported by both its critical and extreme characteristics. Kezar (2014) summarized organizational change theories in higher education into six schools of thought and asserted that multiple lenses are required to successfully achieve second-order change. Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) studied the scaling up process of school reform in the K-12 setting by using the Culture, Structure, and Agency as Mediation System framework. This study draws on these multiple perspectives and co-constructed factors to examine the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs.

This study was designed to examine how a culture of assessment in student affairs changes as the result of the assessment leaders actions and how structural, cultural and agentive factors influence the change. The study design framed the implementation of assessment in student affairs as a change process and thereby brought more theoretical lenses to empirically examine this complex, second-order change. This study also addressed the knowledge gap in the student affairs assessment literature by empirically grounding this complex change process and offering implications for practice and

recommendations for future research. This study builds on the current practitioner-based literature and offers several relevant findings.

Key Findings

Milestones

Time-series analysis (chronological sequencing) helped to identify the key milestones in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs (See Figure 5) which include the development of Our Campus Compact, the establishment of the Student Affairs Research Evaluation and Planning office, the arrival of a new president, the formation of the Student Affairs Assessment Council and the practice of reviewing one another's assessment reports and plans, receiving a commendation from their regional accreditor, and transition at the SAAL level and vice provost for student affairs level. With the exception of the commendation, each of these milestones is considered a structural factor that influenced the change process. And it is important to note that this type of analysis privileges a structural lens because structures are the easiest things for individuals to point to in a change process. Yet each of the milestone's structural features are not what contributed to the change alone. Understanding the milestones in the context of the Culture, Structure, and Agency as Mediation System model (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan, 2002) sheds light on how these milestones activated change.

For example, Our Campus Compact represents a critical milestone both because of when it occurred in the change process and how it exemplified the co-constructed nature of change. Our Campus Compact is ultimately a structure, a document, the content of which represents the division's shared values, a reflection of their culture and

what they wanted it to be. The way that Ray went about creating the Compact, his agency, demonstrates how the three components, structure, culture, and agency act reflexively to shape change. Ray engaged the entire division in the process, he called the document ‘Our Campus Compact’ which emphasizes its purpose as a shared agreement, an active acceptance of what being part of the community involves. The timing of the Compact is important because it was one of the initial milestones. Although it was only mentioned by the two student affairs assessment leaders and Ray, it was clearly still evident in the work of the division. The stated (espoused) values and commitments in the document were reflected in the comments participants shared in interviews. The embedded nature of this foundational document reflects another way to think about reflexivity among structure, culture, and agency. While the Compact started as a structure, a document, perhaps it *became* culture and therefore a more tacit part of ‘the way things work around here’. What once was an espoused theory (Our Campus Compact 22 years ago) now was a theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1996) and therefore implicit in the way other participants carried out their work. Members of the student affairs division no longer referred to the document as a representation of their culture; they just lived the culture and shared with me the relevant elements of it rather than naming the document that summarized it.

Level Analysis Findings

To augment the time series analysis the study design called for comparing interview data in two ways, one was to compare each of the 13 interviews to each other and another was to group interviews by level (divisional leaders, student affairs assessment leaders, unit staff) and compare the groups. This analysis triangulated

findings, further developed and refined codes, and identified differences in perceptions among groups. Using these groups, I interviewed two divisional leaders, three student affairs assessment leaders, and six staff working in the units who all were members of the Student Affairs Assessment Council. These groupings played out because of the two transitions in the vice provost for student affairs and SAAL positions during the change period. I had anticipated interviewing some of the direct reports (See Figure 2), some of the unit heads, and some unit staff in the division. However, due to time constraints and availability of individuals, my groupings turned out differently than planned yet the groupings used yielded key findings related to the levels of the organization.

Two findings from this level analysis are that (1) leaders' intentions were received by participants in the study and (2) only the divisional leaders mentioned the major milestone, Our Campus Compact. First, there were several examples where the intentions stated by a divisional leader were repeated or stated as received and embodied by participants. Messaging and framing are key strategies for leaders in a change process and they were done effectively at CU throughout the process. For example, Annie shared an instance of how she used messaging to encourage members of the division to take initiative, feel empowered to make changes, and understand that they will try many things that will fail. And Grace reflected this message back when she shared that she believes that she can try new things and not be penalized for failing as long as learning is an outcome of a failure. The consistency with which Grace received Annie's message demonstrates that messaging was transmitted clearly between the vice provost for student affairs and unit staff. This clear transmission represents learning as the reflexive element between Annie's agency (messaging) and how Grace internalized those messages and

translated it to a belief that informs her work (culture). This points to a more integrated perspective on culture in this study (Martin, 2002) whereby the vice provost intended to communicate a message that was internalized by unit staff. The second finding from this level analysis points to a more differentiated perspective on culture (Martin, 2002).

Second, the level analysis also revealed that the groups did not identify the same milestones as important to the change process. For example, the leader group identified Our Campus Compact as a milestone while the staff working in the units group did not. One explanation for this is that Our Campus Compact *became* the culture and the document was rendered irrelevant to the staff working in the division because they have embedded the values articulated in the Compact into their work. Another explanation could be that the staff working in the units simply did not consider the Compact an important part of the change process or perhaps just not part of the change process because it was initiated at the very beginning of the change. Several participants discussed the value of being student centered and ensuring their work benefits students. This is a reflection of the stated values in the Compact and supports the former explanation of the difference between the groups. These first two analyses revealed both what was visible and more tangible as well as elements that may not have been present and their absence influenced the change process.

The Absence of...

It is also important to acknowledge that some of the milestones indicated the absence of change – stability. For example, Ray held the vice provost for student affairs role for 19 of the 22-year change process and his consistent presence in the leadership role maintained stability. This stability could have propelled or limited the level of

change in the division of student affairs at CU so it is critical to understand not just the structure – the stability of the individual in the leadership position – but also the form of agency Ray embodied which cultivated a divisional culture that supported change. Ray’s leadership approach is to follow the energy, empower staff to share their voice regardless of title and position. Ray promoted an anti-hierarchical structure and trust through his vulnerable and relationship focused leadership. Ray’s leadership created the space for the division to feel safe in taking risks and learning and he supported the priority set by the division to implement a “comprehensive, on-going assessment program.” Similarly, a new president came on during the change period, a type of structural change which has potential to create a lot of disruption in key leadership positions at a university. Instead, this led to stability again where the president, provost, and vice provost for student affairs were stable for 11 of the 22-year change process.

Another example of the absence of an element influencing the change process is the anti-hierarchical approach to leadership and agency that Ray endorsed. In a different division of student affairs at a different institution, hierarchy may be an important structural element of the culture and titles and positions may have more relevance and meaning than they did at CU during Ray’s tenure as vice provost for student affairs. This lack of structure, hierarchy, appeared to promote trust, learning, safety, and vulnerability among the division that invited and encouraged people to think in new ways or try new things without the risk of negative repercussions.

Coding and Thematic Analysis Findings

In addition to the time series and level analysis, I also completed coding and thematic analysis of the interview data and documents I collected. Two key findings

emerged from this analysis. First, the factors in Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System were also factors that influenced the change process in this study. Structure, culture, and agentive factors as well as their co-constructive nature were clear themes that emerged from my coding and thematic analysis. Second, I approached coding from a grounded theory approach while using structure, culture, and agency as a priori codes. Remaining open to the emergence of additional themes, allowed me to expand on Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) model. I will discuss the two main additional factors identified in the study.

Recognition and other external influences. The commendation milestone represents an element not present in Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System but was evident in this study. The commendation the student affairs division received from their regional accreditor for their efforts in assessment was a major milestone in that each participant mentioned how this propelled their efforts in the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division. In this study, the commendation was an example of what I categorized as recognition and other external influences. The difference in context for the studies may explain why 'recognition and other influences' was a factor in the change process in this study and not in Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) model. One of the distinguishing features of higher education is institutional status whereby colleges and universities are influenced by their context and one another.

After the second round of coding, I created a mind map of each of the codes organized under the a priori codes of structure, culture, and agency. This helped to identify codes that did not fit under these a priori codes. I further mapped each code to

Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought which prompted new ideas in organizing my codes and led to different ways of depicting Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) model. See Table 1. These practices helped to evolve my thinking about how the codes fit together and influenced one another. For example, initially, I only focused on three of Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought, those that emphasize second-order change: cultural, social cognition, and political. By incorporating the other three: evolutionary, institutional, and scientific management, and working with a peer debriefer helped to illuminate the "parent" code, recognition and other external influences. Table 4 shows the relationship between the elements of the Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Change Model and Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought.

Table 4

Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Change Model Aligned with Kezar's (2014) Six Schools of Thought

Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Change Model	Kezar's Six Schools of Thought
Structure	Scientific Management
Culture	Cultural
Agency	Political
Learning	Social Cognition
Recognition and Other External Influences	Evolutionary and Institutional

Note. This table shows the alignment between the elements of the Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Change Model and Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought. The Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Change Model is based on Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Structure, Culture, and Agency as a Mediational System.

Figure 7 illustrates the Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Change Model derived from this study. Recognition and other external influences are shown as arrows

surrounding Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System. These arrows surrounding the Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) model point out that the change process occurs in an open system and connects to Kezar's (2014) institutional school of thought where higher education is viewed as a larger system that influences institutions across type by virtue of outside-of-institution entities such as disciplinary organizations, regional accreditors, or the federal government. In this study, some examples of recognition and other external influences are the commendation from the regional accreditor, recognition from other student affairs divisions as CU represented a leader in student affairs assessment early on in the evolution of assessment in the field, and changes to graduate preparation programs to include assessment in the curriculum.

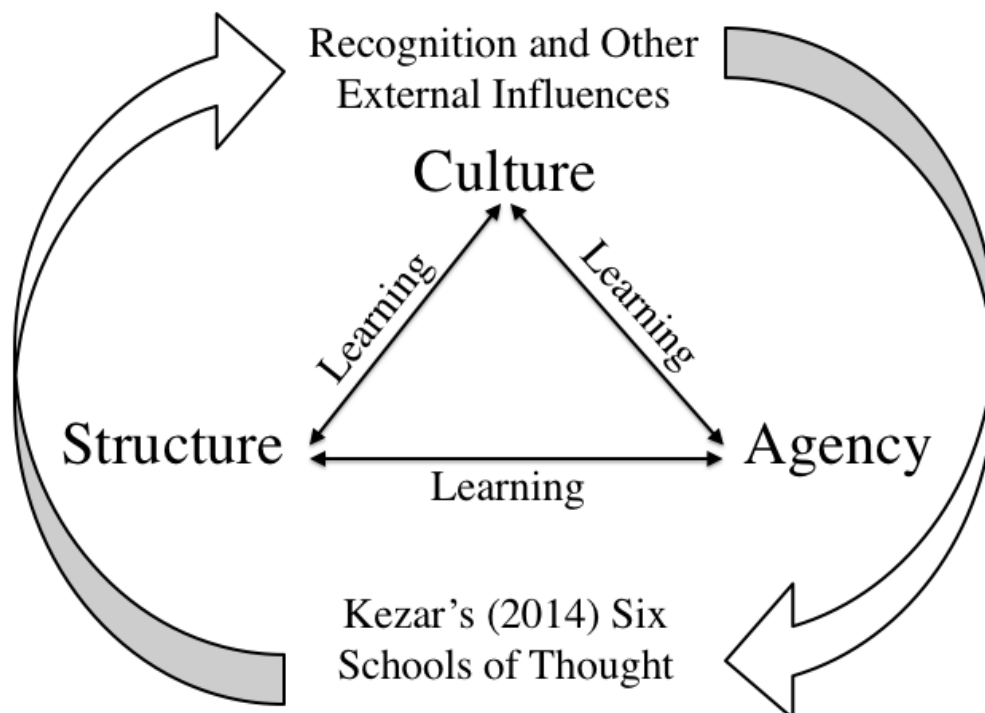


Figure 7. Student affairs culture of assessment change model.

Note. Adapted from Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System.

Learning. Another major code that emerged outside of the three a priori codes was learning. Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) emphasis on the reflexivity of structure, culture, and agency is essential to their study as it was in this study. However, in this study, learning was a major theme in the interview data as well as the documents analyzed and represents the reflexivity Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) embed in their model. I will share some examples of how learning represents the reflexivity among structure, culture, and agency in this study. First the consistency with which members of the division reflected back the messages leaders were trying to convey is a form of learning. For example, participants' interpretation of the structures leaders used to emphasize assessment as a priority in the division (i.e., positions, professional development resources) is a form of messaging. That participants reflected back that these structures were important milestones in the change process indicates that participants internalized the leaders' intent when making decisions to prioritize structural resources emphasizing the importance of assessment in the division's work. Another way the leaders' actions are co-constructed with culture and this co-construction represents learning is that the leaders were consistent with what the division agreed were their priorities. Through the Campus Compact and subsequent strategic planning processes, the division identified assessment as a priority. When leaders follow through on allocating scarce resources to that priority over others, unit staff, unit heads, and direct reports learn to trust that the leader is acting with integrity. The process of engendering and extending trust can represent the reflexivity between agency and culture and can be identified as learning.

Further, Samantha and each of the participants who were part of the Assessment Council emphasized that their group was a learning community and the approach they took was about learning. Kezar's (2014) social cognition school of thought sheds light on learning as an important element of the change process. Some of the practices and processes enacted by the Samantha and the Assessment Council reflect social cognition principles and the reflexivity between the structure, culture, and agency factors. For example, Samantha and the Assessment Council acknowledged a lack of consistency in the language they used to discuss assessment and they utilized their agency to create a structure, a glossary of terms, to promote consistent language, an important element of culture. This example demonstrates the reflexivity between the three factors and illustrates how that reflexivity can be represented by learning. Recognizing and acting on the gap in consistent language use was a form of learning, engaging in a process to develop a common language required learning and agency, and creating a structure that could be useful to other members of the division required learning.

This study found that Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan's (2002) Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System framework transcends the K-12 reform setting and is applicable in the higher education setting with some modifications. The combination of the Culture, Structure and Agency as a Mediation System (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002) framework and Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought provide a more complete set of lenses to understand the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs and the higher education context.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it examined only one institution. The three previous studies related to cultures of assessment in student affairs (Bresciani, 2002; Green, Jones, and Aloï, 2008; and Seagraves and Dean, 2010) suggest that there may be other factors related to the change process beyond structure, culture, and agency. These studies suggested that institutional type and control, accreditation region, and length of the change process may also have an influence on the change process. A single case study does not allow for objective exploration of these factors. Some of these factors arose during interviews but it was not possible to determine if any themes were similar or different from a different case. However, this study did find that additional factors to those anticipated influence the change process.

The extended duration of the change process is a second limitation of this case, staff turnover and the passing of time can interfere with accurate memory. To mitigate this, I interviewed key informants to the change process who are either no longer at the institution or at least no longer in their role related to the change process. Five of the participants fit this criteria. During the interviews, I asked participants to recall major milestones in the change process which served as a useful framework to prompt recall as several circled back to the milestone framework throughout the interview indicating that another question would help them recall another milestone. I also asked probing and follow up questions to prompt participants to recall not just the event but how they felt, what was challenging, what worked, and what did not. I was also able to use information gathered in preceding interviews to inform more pointed questions in subsequent interviews.

The length of the change process in this study connects to Kezar's (2014) evolutionary school of thought which emphasizes the slow, deterministic nature of change and the influence of external forces, especially in the higher education context (pp. 27-29). This perspective heightens curiosity about when change begins and ends, to what extent that matters in the process, and how relevant is the passage of time as a factor in the change process. The evolutionary perspective also points to the importance of framing a culture of assessment as a constantly developing process rather than an end point to be achieved, transitions and change are constantly occurring and needed. And finally, the evolutionary perspective also emphasizes the stages of change for example, change processes at the early stages are less mature than those like Change University at a later stage. There may be important differences for understanding change at different stages of maturity. This study found that while a change process takes time, it is a complex process that involves structural, cultural, and agentive factors, understanding the co-constructed nature of these factors, as well as recognition and external influences – influences that undoubtedly change over time.

Future Research Needed

To address the limitations of this study, future research that incorporates multiple cases from various institutional types and control can reinforce and build on this study's findings. Future research can also further explore the perspectives from the different levels of the organization especially at institutions where hierarchy is more relevant than it is at Change University. This study also led me to new questions: What is an adequate depth and breadth for a culture of assessment in student affairs? What is the tipping point for a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs to be firmly established? Is

it enough to have one position or a partial position in the division to coordinate assessment efforts? Is it enough for assessment to be embedded in certain position descriptions throughout the division? Is some form of an assessment council/committee/team or a position an essential component of a student affairs division attempting to foster and sustain a culture of assessment? Does everyone in the division have to be involved assessment efforts for it to be a legitimate culture of assessment? Would a different model or approach be needed if one is trying to *change* a culture versus starting from the beginning of a culture? Where does culture begin?

I think for now, this study points to the fact that student affairs leaders need to be trained in skills beyond those typically embedded in graduate preparation programs to include foundational skills and theoretical frames for leading change. This study emphasizes the importance of leaders' ability to draw on multiple theoretical frames to analyze a situation and utilize an array of strategies informed by a complex set of theoretical perspectives (Morgan, 2006). Graduate preparation curricula and professional development opportunities should expand to include these critical topics and better prepare student affairs staff to successfully lead in the rapidly changing times in higher education. Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought provide a strong framework from which to begin.

Implications for Practice

If we continue the same practice, should we expect a different result? Scholars have indicated that the practice of assessment in student affairs has not been widely adopted despite the efforts that have been made to encourage this important practice (Blimling, 2013; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2010; Elkins, 2015). Currently,

student affairs assessment leaders rely on practical experience, the current literature, conferences, and other professional development opportunities to prepare them to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in student affairs. The focus of these currently available resources is on the rationale for assessment in student affairs, the mechanics of assessment, and some guidance on implementing assessment in a division of student affairs. This current approach to diffusing assessment as a critical practice in student affairs is limited; the continued reliance on sharing best practices as a strategy connects to one of the distinguishing features of higher education – institutional status – in two ways. First, isomorphism promotes mimicking from one institution to another which limits innovation and critical approaches to address the problem. This feature of higher education can help explain why the adoption of assessment in student affairs is slow and why we need new ways of thinking - framing the implementation of assessment as a change process that draws on multiple perspectives and theories. Second, this mimicking leads to the proliferation of strategies across cultures without regard to the importance of culture, a key, complex element of the change process substantiated by this study. The current approach minimizes the importance of institutional and divisional cultural influences and the additional lenses that can be brought to bear to help us understand how to navigate the intricate collage of structure, culture, and agentive factors that make our divisional contexts unique and therefore require a sophisticated rather than a blunt approach.

Have you ever been in a conversation where you believe you and the other party have agreed on something and then come to learn that the actions you expected from the other party are very different than what actually occurred, and you are left wondering

what happened here? Were we not part of the same conversation where we agreed to X? This cognitive dissonance experience often leads to confusion and frustration rather than an awareness that this scenario represents the impact of underlying cultural influences, the tacit beliefs and assumptions that influence our behavior. While colloquially, higher education can be referenced as a culture, the organizational, micro, and subcultures that exist on different campuses point to the importance of what Morgan (2006) refers to as reading, applying multiple organizational lenses to a situation to both understand and inform actions to address an issue such as the cognitive dissonance example described above. This study demonstrates that the different categories of culture - macro, organizational, sub, and microcultures (Schein, 2010) - influence the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs, a subculture. The combination of these categories of culture are unique to different institutions and therefore leaders must develop the skills to understand how these cultural influences affect the change process in order to shape it toward the intended outcome.

The current resources and approach available to student affairs leaders do not bring theoretical lenses to this complex second-order change nor prepare student affairs assessment leaders to frame the process as a change, read (Morgan, 2006), and apply multiple lenses to understand and facilitate change. This study identifies specific theoretical perspectives that can help practitioners reframe the implementation of assessment in student affairs as a change process and gain a greater understanding of the complexity involved in enacting change. Kezar (2014) and Morgan (2006) assert that leaders can facilitate change effectively when they first understand multiple

organizational perspectives, and second apply the appropriate perspective(s) considering key elements of the situation.

Similarly, chief student affairs officers may not be trained in organizational change theory. However, knowledge of and practice in these valuable theories can help them more effectively support the change process involved in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs, the focus of this study, as well as other change processes they may need to lead at their institution.

What can we learn from the most mature culture of assessment in our field? To answer this question, the reader must be able to understand the complex structural, cultural, and agentive factors present on their own campus. To do that, the reader must have an understanding of organizational change theory (e.g., Kezar's (2014) six schools of thought) and how they can be applied to advance this and other types of changes. To some extent, specific actions may be transferrable to another campus where culture, agency, and structures are similar to that of CU. However, at institutions that are different, specific actions may have a very different effect than they did at CU. Stepping back to understand the model and engage a more theoretical approach allows for more transference and builds the skills of the change agent. For example, learning was a critical element of the change process and had a positive influence at CU; it worked because of the careful agency that Ray and Samantha brought to creating a safe space for learning. If that space were not available, perhaps learning would not have been such an important influence. If we expect a different result, our approach should expand to include more robust perspectives on fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in

student affairs as a change process and apply relevant theoretical frames to prepare student affairs professionals to lead change on their respective campuses.

Conclusion

The current climate in higher education calls student affairs to assess the impact of the learning and development opportunities they provide students yet this practice is not yet widely adopted indicating the need to examine how assessment is adopted in divisions of student affairs. Framing this as a change draws on important theoretical frames that bring these multiple perspectives to bear on the complex practice of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. The current assessment literature focuses on three areas: rationale, mechanics, and guidance for leaders however, this literature is largely based on valuable practitioner experience and can be strengthened by empirical research. This study focused on addressing this gap in the literature and expanding the lens previously applied to include organizational change theory.

This single case study utilized a framework applied to understand K-12 reform efforts – Culture, Structure, and Agency as a Mediation System (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan, 2002) – in the higher education setting. Accounting for the distinctive organizational features of each setting brought organizational change theories of higher education (Kezar, 2014) into the study. I found that structure, culture, and agency as well as their interaction influenced the change process in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs at CU. I also found that the reflexive feature among the three factors indicated the role that organizational learning played in the change process (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). Other factors that influenced the change process included recognition and other external influences.

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APPENDIX A

Defining a Culture of Assessment Delphi Study

Background and Purpose

Several scholars encourage the development of a culture of assessment in divisions of student affairs (Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie, 2016), many offer descriptions of that culture (Bingham, Bureau, Garrison Duncan, 2015; Schuh, 2013), and some offer strategies for how to go about doing this (Bingham, Bureau, Garrison Duncan, 2015; Schuh, 2013; Yousey-Elsener, Bentrim, Henning, 2015). However, a commonly accepted definition does not exist to ground research in this area which imposes limitations on further examination of this important area for student affairs. This Delphi study examines the following research question: how is a culture of assessment in student affairs defined by experts in the student affairs assessment field?

Research Design and Methods

A Delphi study design is most appropriate because the current level of knowledge and research regarding student affairs assessment culture is not adequate to address the research question (Linstone & Turroff, 2002, p. 3-4). Because of the level of agreement in rounds one and two, a three round study was adequate to address the research question. Between each round, I consulted peer reviewers to discuss the results and the design of each subsequent survey.

To identify participants for the study, I consulted an expert in the student affairs assessment field to generate a list of experts on the topic. Since this purposive sample is homogeneous in terms of expertise, the initial group of 16 was appropriate to produce adequate coverage of the topic. I sent the round one survey to the 16 identified experts via email using Qualtrics software. Round one included two open-ended questions, one

asking respondents to identify elements to be included in a definition of a culture of assessment in student affairs and the other asking how many years the respondent worked as a student affairs assessment leader. Refer to the Survey Instrument section for the three surveys. Round one was in the field for eight days, after the initial invitation and two reminder emails, I received 11 responses and determined that this was an adequate response rate to move to round two. After reviewing the open response data, it was clear that I was reaching saturation as several of the responses were redundant. Through descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 102-105), I determined that some of the responses referred to a definition while others referred to characteristics of a culture of assessment. I distinguished these in the second round by creating two five-point Likert scale questions; one asking respondents to indicate how important it was to include each element in the definition and one asking respondents to indicate how important it was to include each element in the list of characteristics describing a culture of assessment in student affairs. In each question, I included an option for open response so that other ideas could be included and rated. I also included an open response question after each Likert scale question so that the respondent could further clarify their responses. This proved very useful in interpreting their responses as participants could explain or qualify their rating. Additionally, one respondent indicated a preference for an alternate term to culture of assessment. I included a question to determine agreement with this statement and found that round two participants didn't agree that the terms are interchangeable for the purpose of research.

Round two was in the field for 17 days, after the initial invitation and two reminders, I received responses from each of the 11 round one participants. To develop

the round three survey, I drafted a definition using the terms identified as having a mean score of 4 or above from round two with slight revisions based on respondent's clarifying comments in the open response questions, See Table A1. The mean score cut off was determined based on the scale, a four or above indicated that the item was very or extremely important to include in the definition or list of characteristics. I asked participants to offer improvements to the draft definition via an open response question. I also listed the characteristics having a mean score of four or above with the option to comment on each to refine the language or add other ideas, see Table A2. And finally, I included one open response question so that respondents could offer any other insights about the definition or characteristics.

Round three was in the field for nine days, after the initial invitation and two reminders I received responses from 10 of the 11 round two respondents. I made slight revisions to the round three definition based on participant feedback and arrived at a final definition. I shared my analysis with three peer debriefers to validate my findings. I plan to develop a rubric with the characteristics and elements of the definition.

Findings

Two findings can be drawn from this study. First, there is general agreement among student affairs assessment experts regarding a definition and characteristics of a culture of student affairs assessment. The round two mean scores for the elements of a definition of a student affairs culture of assessment are shown in Table A1. Items with a mean score of four or above were included in the round three definition. A student affairs culture of assessment is defined as a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an

ongoing, embedded practice of collecting and analyzing data that informs decision-making for the purpose of continuously improving programs and services at all levels of the organization.

Table A1

Mean Scores for Elements of a Definition of Culture of Assessment in Student Affairs

<u>Element</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>N</u>
Assessment is an ongoing process	4.6	11
Assessment results are used to inform decision-making at all levels of the organization	4.5	11
Assessment is embedded in everyday practice	4.2	11
The purpose of assessment is improvement	4.5	11
The purpose of assessment is accountability	2.6	11
Shared values and beliefs driving self-reflection and continuous improvement	3.6	11

Second, the characteristics with strong agreement demonstrate the complexity of a culture of assessment and can be utilized to develop a descriptive rubric that can help student affairs practitioners evaluate and improve their culture of assessment on the various items. These characteristics can also support future research in this area. Table A2 shows the mean scores for each item included in round two. Items with a mean score of four or above were included in round three.

Table A2

Mean Scores for Characteristics of Culture of Assessment in Student Affairs

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>N</u>
Leadership in the form of strong role models/champions throughout the organization	4.4	10
Leadership in the form of accountability	2.9	10
Leadership in the form of vocal support	3.8	10
Leadership in the form of trust to promote safety for negative findings	4.3	10
Ongoing capacity building efforts for staff at all levels of assessment competency	4.1	10
Transparency in assessment processes	3.8	10
Transparency in assessment results	4.2	10
Resources to support assessment practice	4.1	10
Resources allocated to support findings that require changes	4.0	10
Celebration of assessment results	3.9	10
Individuals feel confident in their assessment ability	4.1	10

The final list of characteristics includes both the items identified through round two as well as the original elements of the definition (listed in italics):

1. Strong role models/champions
2. Trust to promote safety in sharing negative results
3. Ongoing capacity building for staff at all levels
4. Transparency in assessment results

5. Resources to support assessment practice
6. Resources to support findings that require changes
7. Individuals feel confident in their assessment ability
8. *Assessment is an ongoing process*
9. *Assessment results are used to inform decision-making*
10. *Assessment is embedded in every day practice*
11. *The purpose of assessment is improvement*
12. *Shared values and beliefs*

Implications

This definition and list of characteristics can serve as a basis for future research on cultures of assessment in student affairs. It is important for researchers to utilize common definitions so that each study can build on the previous one. Further, the characteristics can be utilized to develop tools for student affairs practitioners to appraise the divisional culture of assessment and fine tune their efforts to foster and sustain that culture.

Survey Instrument

Round 1

The purpose of this study is to define the construct “culture of assessment” in student affairs. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert in the field of student affairs assessment. You are among a small group of professionals being asked to participate as a panel expert in a Delphi study about this topic. Your responses will be kept confidential and used to develop a common definition of culture of assessment in student affairs which I hope to use as a basis for my dissertation study. This survey is the first of three brief rounds of the study. Each round will last about a week and should take about 15 minutes to complete.

1. Considering your own experience and the literature on cultures of assessment in student affairs, please list the elements you think are essential to be included in a common definition of a culture of assessment in student affairs. [open response]
2. How many years have you worked as a student affairs assessment leader in your career? [open response]

Round 2

The purpose of this study is to define the construct “culture of assessment” in student affairs. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert in the field of student affairs assessment. You are among a small group of professionals being asked to participate as a panel expert in a Delphi study about this topic. Your responses will be kept confidential and used to develop a common definition of culture of assessment in student affairs which I hope to use as a basis for my dissertation study. This survey is the second of three brief rounds of the study. Each round will last about a week and should take about 15 minutes to complete.

For this round, I coded the first round responses and differentiated between elements of a definition and characteristics or indicators of a culture of assessment.

1. **DEFINITION:** Please indicate how important is it to include each of the following elements in a **definition** of culture of assessment in student affairs. (Matrix format question using a five point Likert scale – not at all important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, extremely important)
 - a. Assessment is an ongoing process
 - b. Assessment results (data) are used to inform decision-making at all levels of the organization
 - c. Assessment is embedded in everyday practice (NOT an add-on or afterthought)
 - d. The purpose of assessment is accountability
 - e. The purpose of assessment is improvement

- f. Shared values and beliefs driving self-reflection and continuous improvement
 - g. Other [open response]
- 2. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question. [open response]
- 3. **CHARACTERISTICS:** Please indicate how important is it to include each of the following elements as **characteristics** that describe a culture of assessment in student affairs. (Matrix format question using a five point Likert scale – not at all important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, extremely important)
 - a. Leadership in the form of strong role models/champions throughout the organization
 - b. Leadership in the form of accountability
 - c. Leadership in the form of vocal support
 - d. Leadership in the form of trust to promote safety for negative findings
 - e. Ongoing capacity building efforts for staff at all levels of assessment competency
 - f. Transparency in assessment processes
 - g. Transparency in assessment results
 - h. Resources to support assessment practice
 - i. Resources allocated to support findings that require changes
 - j. Celebration of assessment results
 - k. Individuals feel confident in their assessment ability
 - l. Other [open response]
- 4. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question. [open response]
- 5. Some scholars use the term culture of assessment and others use the term culture of evidence. Do you think these terms are interchangeable for the purpose of research?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Maybe
 - c. No
- 6. Please share any clarifying comments about your responses to the previous question. [open response]

Round 3

The purpose of this study is to define the construct “culture of assessment” in student affairs. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as an expert in the field of student affairs assessment. You are among a small group of professionals being asked to participate as a panel expert in a Delphi study about this topic. Your responses will be kept confidential and used to develop a common definition of culture of assessment in student affairs which I hope to use as a basis for my dissertation study. This survey is the last of three brief rounds of the study. Each round will last about a week and should take about 15 minutes to complete.

For this round, I calculated the mean for each of the definition items, considered the open responses and drafted a definition. I also calculated the mean for each of the characteristic items and differentiated those scoring 4 or above and below 4 as a cutoff for use in my dissertation study.

1. **DEFINITION:** Please offer suggestions to improve the draft definition of culture of assessment in student affairs.

A culture of assessment in student affairs is defined as a set of shared values and beliefs that inspire an ongoing, embedded practice of rigorous examination generating evidence that informs decision-making for the purpose of enhancing programs and services at all levels of the organization. [open response]

2. **CHARACTERISTICS:** From round two, the following characteristics had a mean score of 4 or above indicating that the characteristic was a very/extremely important indicator of a culture of assessment in student affairs.

Please offer any comments about these characteristics. Items marked with * are elements from the definition that scored 4 or above.

- a. Leadership in the form of strong role models/champions throughout the organization [open response]
 - b. Leadership in the form of trust to promote safety for negative findings [open response]
 - c. Ongoing capacity building efforts for staff at all levels of assessment competency [open response]
 - d. Transparency in assessment results [open response]
 - e. Resources to support assessment practice [open response]
 - f. Resources allocated to support findings that require changes [open response]
 - g. Individuals feel confident in their assessment ability [open response]
 - h. Assessment is an ongoing process* [open response]
 - i. Assessment results (data) are used to inform decision-making at all levels of the organization* [open response]
 - j. Assessment is embedded in everyday practice (NOT an add-on or afterthought)* [open response]
 - k. The purpose of assessment is to enhance programs and services* [open response]
 - l. Overall comments on the set [open response]
3. **CHARACTERISTICS:** From round two, the following characteristics had a mean score of less than 4 indicating that the characteristic was a moderately/slightly/not at all important indicator of a culture of assessment in student affairs.

- a. Leadership in the form of accountability [open response]
 - b. Leadership in the form of vocal support [open response]
 - c. Transparency in assessment processes [open response]
 - d. Celebration of assessment results [open response]
 - e. Other [open response]
4. Please share any overall comments about the definition and/or characteristics. [open response]

APPENDIX B

Student Affairs Culture of Assessment Interview Guide

Student Affairs Assessment Leader (SAAL)

Prior to visit:

1. Request relevant documents including framing documents, processes, procedures, educational resources, mission statements, and divisional organizational chart.
2. Consider the starting point of your efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division. From that point through today, draw a timeline of the process used to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division. Please include major milestones along with associated dates to the best of your knowledge.

At visit:

First Interview

1. Describe the timeline, as we talk, we can fill in anything else that comes to mind as we discuss it.
2. Structure – describe how I have defined and operationalized structure.
 - a. Tell me about any policies you have in place to guide assessment efforts. How do you think they have influenced the change from the time you began working toward a culture of assessment to where you are now.
 - b. Tell me about any processes you have in place to guide assessment efforts. How do you think they have influenced the change from the time you began working toward a culture of assessment to where you are now.
 - c. Tell me about how your reporting line influences your efforts in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.
 - d. Tell me about how your position's relationship to other positions in the division (vice president, senior leadership, unit leads, other staff) influences your efforts in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.
 - e. Do you have an assessment team/committee? How has that influenced your efforts in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
 - f. How do you communicate with the division regarding fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment? For example, website, email, workshops, meetings, retreats, etc.
 - g. Are there any other things related to policies, practices, procedures, or organizational structure that influence your efforts in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
3. Culture – describe how I have defined and operationalized culture.
 - a. Tell me about the culture of the division before you began the process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.
 - i. What were some of the key implicit or underlying values, assumptions, norms? How did they support or interfere with the change process?
 - ii. Describe the relevant history or key traditions of the division? How did they support or interfere with the change process?

- b. Are there any other elements of the divisional or institutional culture that we haven't talked about? If so, please describe them and discuss how they support or interfere with the change process?
 - c. Tell me about any resistance you encounter(ed) as you led/lead the process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.
 - i. What do you think is the source of the resistance or compliance without commitment?
 - ii. How do you address it?
- 4. Agency – describe how I have defined and operationalized agency.
 - a. Tell me about how divisional and institutional leadership are involved in the process of fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.
 - i. What do they do to support or interfere in the process?
 - b. Describe how you work with the different levels of the division (individual, unit, division?) in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment.
 - c. What steps do you take to shape shared language and values regarding a culture of assessment?
 - d. To what extent has/does your approach to fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment match the divisional/institutional culture?
 - i. Please describe how you determined the divisional/institutional culture and how you tailor your approach accordingly.
 - e. What steps do you take to promote learning and sensemaking in terms of assessment at the individual, unit, and divisional levels.
 - f. How have you responded to competing interests, conflict, and power, with respect to fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
- 5. Rival explanations
 - a. To what extent do you think the length of time you have been working on this has influenced the change process?
 - b. To what extent do you think the amount of resources you have allocated to this effort influenced the change process?
 - c. To what extent do you think you would be where you are now if the culture of assessment was allowed to naturally emerge, without specific interventions?

Second Interview (to be conducted after the other interviews are completed)

- 1. Questions will be developed as other interviews are completed.

Divisional Leadership (vice president for student affairs, other senior leaders) – questions will be refined and further developed after document analysis and initial interview with the SAAL.

- 1. General
 - a. What do you think have been some of the key elements in the change process?
- 2. Structure - describe how I have defined and operationalized structure.

- a. How do you think the organizational structure and reporting lines of the division support or interfere with fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
 - b. How do you think policies, practices, and/or procedures support or interfere with fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
 - c. Are there other structural elements that influence efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division?
- 3. Culture - describe how I have defined and operationalized culture.
 - a. How would you describe the divisional culture? What are some of the values and beliefs that shape the culture?
 - b. How does the institutional culture support or interfere with divisional efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division?
 - c. How does the divisional culture support or interfere with efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division?
- 4. Agency - describe how I have defined and operationalized agency.
 - a. How would you describe your role in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division?
 - b. How would you describe your relationship to the SAAL?
 - c. What other elements of leadership influence the change process?
 - d. How have you responded to competing interests, conflict, and power, with respect to fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?

Unit Representatives (unit leads, assessment team members, etc.) – questions will be refined and further developed after document analysis and initial interview with the SAAL.

- 1. General
 - a. What do you think have been some of the key elements in the change process?
- 2. Structure - describe how I have defined and operationalized structure.
 - a. How do you think the organizational structure and reporting lines of the division support or interfere with fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
 - b. How do you think policies, practices, and/or procedures support or interfere with fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?
 - c. Are there other structural elements that influence efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division?
- 3. Culture - describe how I have defined and operationalized culture.
 - a. How would you describe the divisional culture? What are some of the values and beliefs that shape the culture?
 - b. How does the institutional culture support or interfere with divisional efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division?
 - c. How does the divisional culture support or interfere with efforts to foster and sustain a culture of assessment in the division?
- 4. Agency - describe how I have defined and operationalized agency.

- a. How would you describe your role in fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division?
- b. How would you describe your relationship to the SAAL?
- c. What other elements of leadership influence the change process?
- d. How have you responded to competing interests, conflict, and power, with respect to fostering and sustaining a culture of assessment?

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Key Study Contacts

Member	Margaret Leary	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	margaretleary@SanDiego.edu
Member	Christopher Newman	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	cnewman@SanDiego.edu